"DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND": The Story of a Clever Amateur Detective. (See page 609.)

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 411. FOR WEEK ENDING NOVEMBER 14TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

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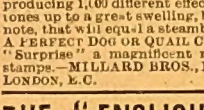

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No. 411.] [One Penny

For the Week ending November 14th, 1896.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

SIR EUSTACE MARSTON was the soul of hospitality but he was not always discreet in his choice of guests. There were none who would refuse an invitation to Marston Manor; there were plenty who came away with their noses in the air, wondering "where Sir Eustace manages to pick up the people he asks to meet one, don't you know." The fact was, that Sir Eustace, a genial, florid old giant of sixty, had one weak point—hunting. Let a casual acquaintance introduce a total stranger to the baronet with the remark added, "First-rate across country, Sir Eustace," and it was odds that the Squire would invite the two to Marston Manor to try their luck in his own famous country. This fact was so notorious that many who wanted a few days' hunting, or who wished to see the glories of Marston Manor, got themselves introduced to Sir Eustace and fished for an invitation on the strength of a reputation that was not always justified. The Squire, good easy man, scarcely troubled himself about the social consideration of his guests—though, of course, he knew where and when to draw the line—and so it came about that not a few whom nobody knew, and whom it would not have harmed anybody to know, were admitted to the Manor. As were, occasionally, certain others.

November was gone, December was half over, and all the time guests had been coming and going; but to-day the house was empty, and Miss Marston and her friend, Lucy Fulton, were spending a quiet afternoon together, discussing friends who had departed and those whose arrival was still expected.

"So Everard Hood is coming to-night," said Lucy, with a sidelong look at Miss Marston. "How many times will this make, Gertrude?"

Gertrude rose quickly and lifted a heap of Liberty silks from the sofa to the table. "I don't think I understand." she said in some confusion.

"Don't you, dear?" mocked Lucy. "Then I'll explain. He is coming down to propose to you for the third time. Have you made up your mind what answer you will give him?"

"Mr. Hood has just returned from Siberia," said Gertrude, frowning slightly and ignoring the question.

"I know, and I suppose he will be off to the South Pole if you refuse him again. That seems to me to be

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the only place on the globe he has not visited. Well, you need not answer unless you choose. Of course, you will refuse him? What attraction can he possibly have for a girl like you?"

"There is a very great deal more in him than in the men you delight to honour with your preference, my dear Luce," answered Gertrude rather tartly.

Lucy burst out laughing. "You have risen to the bait," she cried, clapping her hands. "Now I shall watch the issue of this visit with all the more interest."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Gertrude, sweeping the silks together in a heap. "I hope I am able to do justice to a man's good points without necessarily being in love with him." She flushed again as she spoke.

"Oh, certainly," acquiesced Lucy with a little *moue*. "But I am quite sure Everard Hood is not your ideal. He is not mine, at all events. What is your ideal, Gertrude?"

A smile twitched at the corners of Gertrude's mouth. "How fast you go, Luce," she said. "My ideal! Well, now, really, it is so nebulous—I——"

"Then I'll materialise it, or, rather, him, into definite shape," cried the irrepressible Lucy joyously. "Listen, now. He has the face of a Viking and the manners of a—of a—Chesterfield."

Gertrude burst out laughing. "Oh, spare me, Luce," she cried. "What a combination!"

"Wait until I have finished," went on Lucy. "He is tall and broad-shouldered, with well-chiselled features and keen blue eyes—rather a soldierly type, you know—fair hair and a moustache, of course. Handsome all over and—why, good gracious!" she broke off, looking out of the window, "if here isn't the very identical ideal driving up to the house at the precise moment when I am describing him."

"What do you mean?" asked Gertrude, peeping over her friend's shoulder. "Ah!" she exclaimed, drawing back quickly. "It is Mr. Hood; and he must have seen us looking at him. How very annoying!"

"What does it matter?" said Lucy, gaily waving her hand to Hood. "Being a man, he will flatter himself that you were watching for his arrival; being a lover, he will not dare to believe it. But never mind him. Did you notice the other man? What a face! What a figure! What a voice! How he rolled out his directions to the groom about the portmanteau that had been left behind! There is your Chesterfieldian Viking, all ready to your hand. You have only to show yourself, my dear, and he is yours. Who *can* he be?"

"Love laughs at locksmiths."

"You'll exhaust your notes of admiration if you don't stop," said Gertrude impatiently. "I'm sure I wish you would—stop, I mean. We've done nothing but talk man for the last half hour. Do come and look at these silks."

"There was one note of interrogation, if you remember," persisted Lucy. "Who is he?"

"Colonel Dubois, I presume. He is the only other guest expected to-day."

"A soldier! Then that makes up the tale. Is he French? He can't be with a face like that. Have you known him long? I never heard you speak of him. Come now, tell me all about him."

"I never heard of him myself until yesterday," replied Gertrude. "I understand from my father that he speaks both French and English perfectly, that he holds a commission in the French army, and that he is very fond of hunting." They both laughed a little. "Sir Eustace met him in town, liked him, and asked him down here. *Voilà tout!* There's the dressing bell."

"Gertrude," whispered Lucy mischievously, as they went upstairs, "I materialised this beautiful ideal for you, and, of course, he's yours if you want him; but if you don't—oh, my dear, would you mind letting me try my powers of fascination?"

"I think you are an absolutely horrid girl, Luce," laughed Gertrude. "I have a great mind to write to your mother, and ask her to lock you up."

"Do, by all means," retorted Lucy saucily, as she ran off to her room. "Love laughs at locksmiths."

When, later on, Gertrude descended to the drawing-room, a tall man, who had been staring out of the window, turned to greet her with a low bow.

"Colonel Dubois?" said the girl, smiling a welcome.

"The same," he replied, bowing still lower over her outstretched hand. "And you, no doubt, are the renowned Miss Marston, whose praises are in everyone's mouth."

The strongly marked roll of the "r," and an occasional transposition of his words from the English to the French order, suggested a prolonged residence abroad, rather than a foreign origin, and with his wavy, yellow hair, and steel-blue eyes, there was nothing French about him. He might have sat for the portrait of Lucy's Viking.

Nevertheless, and notwithstanding his handsome presence, Gertrude recoiled from him instinctively. His very first words, and the glance which accompanied them, roused an antagonistic spirit within her, though, if pressed for reasons for such an attitude she would probably have taken refuge in the declaration of her conviction that Colonel Dubois was not, in feminine parlance, "nice."

Withdrawing her hand from his somewhat too fervent clasp, she answered rather distantly:

"I am Miss Marston, though I do not know that I possess any title to renown."

"Are you so deaf then to the noise of fame?" said the Colonel gallantly. "It is not usually so with beautiful women."

"What an embarrassing person," thought Gertrude, and in her relief at the entrance of the others, she greeted Hood much more warmly than she had intended to do.

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"You must go in alone to-night, Hood," said Sir Eustace. "Never mind, we shall find a companion for you before you leave us, I hope."

The words were spoken without intention; but Hood

Hood stooped and kissed her.

could not help raising his eyes to Gertrude's face. He was still smiling from the warmth of her welcome, and she, seeing his joy, found herself equally unable to resist smiling back at him as she took the Colonel's arm.

"We shall have a full house to-morrow," said Sir Eustace, as they entered the dining-room; "but to-night we must just make the most of one another."

"I could contemplate with equanimity a reduction of the present company by three," murmured the Colonel under cover of the rustling they made in taking their places.

Gertrude flushed hotly. She resented the impertinence of the implication, but in her own house she felt powerless. The glance she gave the Colonel, however, boded ill for that gallant warrior's chances of sitting at her end of the table on the following night.

Hood saw the blush and immediately became possessed of an insane desire to kick the Colonel. The impulse overcame him so far that he actually raised his foot beneath the table and brought it rather violently down again.

"Oh!" screamed Lucy, dropping her soup-spoon. "Whatever is the matter with you, Mr. Hood? Do you know that is my foot? If you are subject to fits I shall move to the other side of the table."

The picture of confusion, Hood stretched out his hand to his glass, but the slender stem, unable to withstand the pressure of his nervous fingers, snapped in two, and a lake of sherry flowed over the spotless damask.

Lucy shot a mischievous glance at Gertrude and broke into a merry laugh, while Sir Eustace cried in his loud, jovial voice: "Don't look so glum, man; there's no harm done."

"You have been in some strange places since last we saw you, Mr. Hood," said Gertrude; and her smile steadied him at once.

"Yes," he answered, "and among stranger peoples. The manners and customs of the Tibetans are a trifle more singular than our own, curious though the latter sometimes be."

"Tibet," exclaimed Lucy. "That is the country where the inhabitants fire off electric sparks from their sheepskin coats on the slightest provocation, is it not?"

Hood smiled and was proceeding to explain, when the Colonel interrupted, "I've been there. What did you think of them? A lot of rascally savages and thieves. Eh?"

"Savages and thieves are to be found everywhere," said Hood quietly. "One need not go as far as Tibet to look for them."

"Your powers of observation are profound, sir," remarked the Colonel drily.

"But as to Tibet?" Gertrude hastened to ask, feeling vaguely that there was tension somewhere.

"Personally I found the Tibetans pleasant fellows enough; and as for thieves—why, I have seen bigger rascals in, let us say, Europe, than I ever encountered in the land of the Lamas."

The words were addressed to Gertrude, but as he finished speaking, Hood shifted his eyes to the Colonel's face and held them there for a second. And again Gertrude thrilled with an unpleasant sense of coming trouble.

"Your experience of the Tibetans was fortunate," said Colonel Dubois. "Myself, I was once left with nothing but the clothes I lay down in, for the beggars stole my baggage while I was asleep."

"Were they caught?" inquired Lucy.

"They were," answered the Colonel grimly. "Mounting a swift horse, I set off instantly in pursuit. I came up with them at length, six stalwart desperadoes, each armed to the teeth." He paused.

"Well?" cried Lucy breathlessly. "Don't keep us in such suspense."

"I cut them down to a man," finished the Colonel with a ferocious twist of his moustache, and, it seemed to Gertrude, a significant glance at Hood.

"Can these two have met before?" she wondered within herself. "I understood not. They don't love one another, it is evident. Surely Everard is not silly enough to be jealous of a creature like this." If Hood had but heard that thought expressed in words!

"A swift retribution," Hood was saying as Gertrude's wandering mind strayed back to the conversation; "yet no doubt preferred by them to the life of bondage that falls to the lot of the European criminal."

"Oh, I don't agree with you," said Gertrude. "Life is sweet, and one may come out of prison some day, you know."

"Certainly," assented Everard. "Prisons are rather comfortable places than otherwise, I should imagine—in this country, at all events. But picture what

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existence must be in a chain gang at Portland or Cayenne. I expect you could draw us a lively picture of that, Colonel!"

"I, sir!" exclaimed the Colonel, glaring at him. "What do you mean by that?"

"I naturally thought you would be acquainted with

"Please tell me, there's a dear."

the French convict system," said Hood apologetically, as Gertrude, with something like terror in her face, signalled swiftly to Lucy and rose to withdraw.

But if the Colonel suspected Hood of any covert impertinence, the latter certainly did his best to remove the impression, for he laid himself out to be agreeable with such success that when the two men joined the ladies in the drawing-room they were chatting together in the most amicable fashion. The Colonel had Everard by the arm and was laughing boisterously at something the other had said, his large bulk seeming to dwarf his companion's small, though wiry frame. Gertrude glanced anxiously at them, but something in Hood's eyes reassured her, and taking up a piece of music she sat down at the piano.

"You seem to be getting on capitally with Colonel Dubois," she remarked when a few minutes later she found herself alone with Hood.

"Ah, yes," he answered. "A lively person, very."

"You have never met before?"

"Well, perhaps, once. But I can't be sure. One meets so many people here and there about the world."

"It was not, I presume, in Tibet."

"No; it certainly was not there," said Hood with a quiet smile. "He would be a terrible person to encounter in the wilds."

They both laughed as their eyes met, and in that moment Hood took comfort from something he read in his companion's face. He was about to speak, when Gertrude said, somewhat hurriedly: "I hope your horses are none the worse for their journey down."

"No," answered Hood, taking his cue from her; "I paid them a visit before dinner, and they were looking very fit."

"What are the Colonel's mounts like?" pursued the girl, who had a passion for horses.

"I can't tell you, for he has brought no horses with him. I think he expects Sir Eustace to mount him."

"Really!" exclaimed Gertrude, much surprised. "I understood my father to say that Colonel Dubois was bringing three hunters with him. I must have been mistaken. You will have a good day to-morrow, I think," she continued. "There is no appearance of a frost."

"I hope so," said Hood, "for I expect it will be the last run I shall have for some time."

"Why?" inquired Gertrude.

"I think of sailing for Australia early in the year. I have heard that an exploring party is to start from Melbourne, and I should like to join it."

A shade of trouble came into Gertrude's eyes, and though she strove to speak lightly, there was a note of anxiety in her voice as she answered: "How insatiable you are, Mr. Hood. One would think you must have grown tired of wandering over the face of the earth. Do you never intend to settle down in your own beautiful home?"

"Yes," answered Hood quickly; "the very moment I can persuade someone to share it with me. Gertrude!" He took her hand and looked into her eyes.

"Gertrude!" he said again.

Gertrude blushed hotly. Whether she had lowered her guard by accident or design she alone knew; but she met his glance bravely and left her hand in his.

Everard held it as one in a dream. The swiftness of his own assault and the sudden capitulation of the citadel he had so long besieged in vain, bewildered him. He could not believe in his good fortune. He had nothing to say.

Gertrude understood and felt sorry for him. "Well," she whispered, "are you going to Australia—Everard?"

Hood stooped and kissed her. "No," he said with a poetry very unusual in him; "to Elysium."

Lucy looked keenly at them when she entered the drawing-room a few minutes afterwards. She learnt nothing from their faces, but her keen eyes noted that a rose which Gertrude had been wearing had found its way to the buttonhole of Hood's coat, and she drew her own conclusions. "I'll have it out with her by-and-bye," she thought, while aloud she said: "Come here, Gertrude. You are wanted to settle a point."

"What is it?" asked Gertrude, moving across the room to where Lucy and Colonel Dubois were seated

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upon a couch. Hood followed her and took up his position behind the couch, so that he could feast his eyes upon Gertrude unobserved. In a chair by the fire Sir Eustace slumbered serenely.

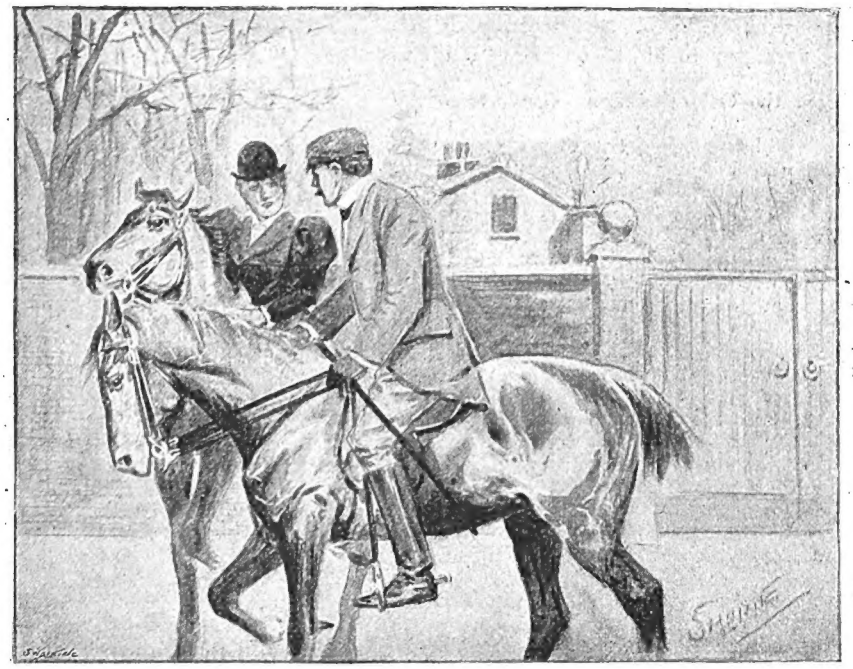
"Colonel Dubois has been entertaining me with some of his adventures," said Lucy. "And very amusing they are, some of them." She laughed—a little derisively, Gertrude thought.

"And I suppose you have been arguing with your usual freedom," her hostess smiled at her.

"No," said Lucy demurely. "I have listened meekly, as a woman should do to the words of a hero. It was only just now that I ventured for the first time to differ with Colonel Dubois."

"And am I to support you?" asked Gertrude.

"We were speaking of jewels just before you came in," went on Lucy, "and Colonel Dubois asserted that the finest rubies he had ever seen were set in the hilt of the scimitar of some Eastern potentate with a name I won't venture to try and pronounce. I suggested that the famous Marston rubies were probably finer. The Colonel doubts the possibility of this, and as I feel sure he will agree with me when once he has seen your rubies, I want you to show them to him and convince him."



"Where do you keep the key of your jewel-safe?"

Gertrude had never yet worn these wonderful gems, and as Lucy spoke the thought crossed her mind that before many months were over she would deck herself in them for somebody's benefit, and she smiled up at Everard. The expression with which he was regarding the Colonel almost startled her, but his face cleared as their eyes met, and he smiled back at her.

"Perhaps it is out of Miss Marston's power to show us the jewels," said the Colonel. "I have no doubt that gems of such value are bestowed elsewhere for safe custody."

"No," answered Gertrude; "they are here. It is a whim of my father's to have them in the house. He argues that if they are not secure here, they cannot be so anywhere else. So they are deposited in a wall safe in my boudoir and I keep the key. I do not like the responsibility, I can assure you."

"Well, no harm has come of it so far," observed Lucy, "and, if the pretty things belonged to me, I confess I should dearly love to have them where I could take an occasional peep at them I am passionately fond of all sorts of gems—particularly rubies."

"They must be a great temptation to the servants, I should think," said the Colonel.

"We have every confidence in them, most of them being old retainers," replied Gertrude coldly.

"You probably owe your immunity from attempts at robbery to the fact that it must be generally supposed that the jewels are not kept here," said Everard. "If the truth were known generally, matters might be different."

"True," agreed the Colonel. "There are some precious clever fellows among the house-breaking fraternity nowadays. I must say I should be inclined to put them in a safer place."

"We are getting no nearer to the point," cried Lucy impatiently. "I want to have it settled that your rubies are finer than any the Colonel has seen."

"They must be very fine indeed to eclipse my friend the Rajah's," said the Colonel. "Perhaps," with one of his killing glances, "you will not object to letting me see and compare them, Miss Marston. I set up to be rather a connoisseur in these things. But if it is too much trouble——"

"Not at all," answered Gertrude, turning away. "I will go and get them."

"Eh! What's that?" said Sir Eustace, who had been awake for a few minutes and, as his habit was, listened to the conversation to gather an idea of what was going on, in the fond belief that it would appear that he had not been to sleep at all. "No, no; it is too late. You shall see the jewels to-morrow. Come, Hood, let us go to the tower. Colonel, you will smoke a cigar before turning in? Be off to bed, girls. The meet is an early one."

"Gertrude," announced Lucy, as she reached her bed-room door, "I'm coming in presently for a good long chat."

"Not to-night," pleaded Gertrude. "I'm so tired, and we have to be up early, you know."

"You can't deceive me, my dear," nodded Lucy. "What did Everard say to you when we were out of the room?"

Gertrude's face was in the shadow, but she laughed as she answered: "Do you want to know very much?"

"I do, indeed. Please tell me, there's a dear."

"He declared most emphatically," said Gertrude

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slowly, "that—he was going to Australia immediately. Good-night. I'm going to lock my door."

What would Sir Eustace Marston have thought if he had seen, some two hours later, a man steal through the dark galleries, revolver in hand, make for the door of Gertrude's boudoir, open it and glide softly in? What would Gertrude have thought had she known that the man who thus entered and who, after localising the safe that held the precious treasure, drew softly behind the window curtains, was Everard Hood?

* * * * *

"Couldn't have a better hunting morning," said Sir Eustace, when they met again at the breakfast table. "Look at the sky. Where's the Colonel? If he doesn't look sharp we must start without him. I thought he was so keen about hunting. Ah, here he comes."

The door opened, and Colonel Dubois appeared, limping laboriously and with an expression of pain upon his handsome face.

"Good gracious! What is the matter, Colonel?" cried Sir Eustace, springing to his feet. "Have you met with an accident?"

"No, no," answered the Colonel, sinking slowly into a chair beside Gertrude. "It is merely an old wound I got in the knee when fighting the Arabs. It troubles me much at times, and I fear the cold journey of yesterday has affected it badly."

"But you can't sit a horse in that condition," said Sir Eustace plaintively.

"I fear not," replied the Colonel deprecatingly. "However, never mind about me. I will try and make myself happy by the smoking-room fire while you are away."

"So very annoying," grumbled Sir Eustace. "Really I think you two girls ought to stay at home and keep the poor fellow company."

"Not for the world," said the Colonel earnestly. "It would give me far more pain than I now suffer were I to be the means of spoiling your sport. Pray do not think of such a thing for a moment."

"After all, you will not be left so very long alone," said Sir Eustace. "Half-a-dozen people will arrive after luncheon, and I expect we shall be back between four and five."

"That will do famously," agreed the Colonel, glancing at Everard, who just then rose and left the room.

"Send my man to me in the library, please, Jenkins," Hood asked the butler, whom he met in the hall.

"Yes, sir."

"I have something to say to you, Williams," began Hood when his man joined him. "Attend carefully and carry out all I say to the letter. A great deal depends upon your doing so."

Williams was an old campaigner upon whom Hood could thoroughly rely, for they had been together in many an out-of-the-way place, and though the nature of the instructions he now received was sufficiently surprising, he made no comment, asked no questions, but simply promised obedience. Whereupon Hood left him and hastened to the front door, where the party, minus the disabled warrior, were preparing to mount their hacks.

Hood assisted Gertrude into her saddle, and swung into his own. Then, after waiting until Lucy and Sir Eustace had ridden some little distance ahead, he said: "I shall ride as far as the meet with you, Gertrude, and then I must leave you, as I have some very important business to attend to. You will not mind, I hope."

"I shall mind very much indeed, sir," answered Gertrude, with a little pout. "Can you not lay aside your business on this particular morning?"

"No," said Hood, with a smile; "not even on this particular morning. My business refuses to wait. Do not draw attention to my absence, though. In fact, Gertrude, I may as well tell you I am preparing a little surprise for you."

"A surprise for me!" echoed Gertrude. "Is it a pleasant one?"

"In a way, yes," answered Hood. "It has its disagreeable side; but that may be discounted if the—the surprise comes off as I expect it to. Don't ask me any more."

"Oh, you are too tantalising, Everard. I would rather you had told me nothing, dear, than so little."

"Where do you keep the key of your jewel-safe?" asked Hood suddenly, with apparent irrelevance.

"Upon this." She touched a fine gold chain that wound like bangles round her wrist. "It is very small, you see, and it never leaves me, though I do not always wear it here."

"Will you lend it to me for a few hours?"

"Everard!"

"I admit the request is an extraordinary one. But will you humour my whim?"

Something in his face checked Gertrude as she was about to speak, and, without another word, she unwound the chain from her wrist and handed it to him. In another moment they came in sight of the meet.

As the groom led up his hunter, Hood changed mounts to avoid exciting observation and comment and mingled for a few moments with the crowd. But as soon as the cheery "Gone away!" pealed through the crisp air, he pulled his horse back and, leaving the field to find their way after the cracks who were already sailing over the first fence, wheeled round and rode towards the groom, whom he mightily astonished by dismounting.

"I shall not follow to-day, Tom," he explained; "so lead Brown Man home again. I am going down into the village to do a little business and then I shall return. Look out for me at the stables, not at the front. And, Tom"—he slipped a sovereign into the groom's hand—"if you should see anybody—Colonel Dubois, for instance—don't mention my return."

"Very good, sir," answered Tom, and Hood, remounting his cob, trotted rapidly off to the village, which lay, with its tiny railway station, some two miles from Marston Manor.

He alighted at the post office, where he wrote out a lengthy telegram, which he handed to the post-mistress, who started with surprise and looked inquisitively at him as she read it over.

Hood noted the start. "It would be a great pity," he said gravely, "a very great pity, indeed, if it were to leak out that anything exceptional in the way of a telegram had been sent from here this morning."

The post-mistress, a fat, florid person of middle age, notorious for her love of gossip, flushed deeply, but received the hint in silence, and Hood, pocketing his change, left, and rode back to the Manor House, where he found Tom awaiting him at the stables.

Assured that all was quiet, Hood entered the house by the back door, ascended the servants' stairs and reached his own room unobserved by anyone but a solitary chambermaid, who stared at him in some astonishment. Williams, who was sitting in a chair by the door, started up as his master entered.

"Well, have you anything to report?" asked Hood.

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"Not much, sir," answered Williams. "The maids were busy about the bed-rooms until some twenty minutes since; but he must have been on the watch, for shortly after they had gone away he came downstairs very quietly and made for the young

Seated .... by the fire, reading the TIMES.

lady's room. He was almost at the door when I came out of this room into the corridor with your coat in one hand, and a clothes-brush in the other. At sight of me he pulls up short. 'Oh!' says he, sharp and sudden, as if he couldn't help himself. With that, he claps his hand to his leg and limps downstairs to the hall. But he hadn't much of a limp when first I caught sight of him, sir."

"You are sure he has not come up again and gone to his room?"

"Quite, sir. His room is just above your own. Besides, I must have seen him if he had come up. I took a peep over the well of the staircase after he had gone down, and he was steering for the tower. I expect he's in the smoking-room now."

"Well, we must not lose time," said Hood. "Have you got what I told you to get?"

"Yes, sir," replied Williams with a subdued grin. He opened a wardrobe and brought out something which he handed to Hood. "Hold it carefully, sir," he warned. "There's no mistake about it."

Hood took the thing gingerly enough, and walked out of the room. "Go to the well of the staircase and look over, Williams," he ordered. "He will not come up if he sees you there."

Williams took up his position, while Hood made his way to Gertrude's boudoir, the door of which he softly closed and locked behind him.

He soon had the safe open, and, rummaging among its contents, lifted out a square, brass-bound box, which he set upon a chair beside him. Then with a good deal of care, he placed the thing he carried in his hand on the floor of the safe and covered it lightly with papers. He then closed the safe, leaving the key, with the chain attached to it, in the lock, took up the box, and returned to his own room, where he placed his precious burden under lock and key once more.

"All right, Williams," he said to his man. "Go back to your post of observation and keep carefully out of sight. As soon as he comes upstairs, no matter when, lock the door leading to the servants' stairs and bring me the key."

He went downstairs and entered the smoking-room, where he found Colonel Dubois seated in a chair by the fire, reading the *Times*.

At sight of him the Colonel dropped his paper with an exclamation of surprise. "Back again already, Mr. Hood," he said. "The run must have been very short."

"I am alone," explained Hood. "I did not start, as my horse cast a shoe. How is your leg?"

"Rather better, thanks; but very painful still." He rose as Hood filled his pipe and took up an illustrated paper. "Excuse me, I must go upstairs and get a handkerchief."

"Let me ring," said Hood, springing towards the bell. "The less you move about the better, I should say."

The Colonel sat down again. "You are very kind," he said. "Don't trouble, please; I find I have one here. Do you know by what train Sir Eustace's guests are expected?"

"They will be here shortly after three, I believe." They chatted in a desultory fashion for half-an-hour or so, when the butler appeared and announced luncheon.

Hood rose at once. "Are you coming?" he asked. "Or would you like something sent in here?"

"I'll come with you," said the Colonel, rising, after a moment's hesitation, and hobbling to the door.

The meal was not a very lively one, though Hood ate with a good appetite. But the Colonel seemed abstracted and merely trifled with his food.

"Your leg appears to pain you a good deal," remarked Hood as they finished. "Come back into the smoking-room and forget your troubles in tobacco. I can offer you a very excellent weed."

The Colonel hesitated again, but finally accepted the offer and they returned to the tower.

"Confoundedly sleepy sort of day," observed Hood, blowing rings of smoke into the air. He looked at his watch. "Half-past two. They will be here in an hour or so."

"If you will excuse me, I will go to my room and lie down," said the Colonel. "This pain is becoming intolerable."

"A good idea," acquiesced Hood, "I shall curl up here and take forty winks myself. *Au revoir.*" He threw himself back in his chair with a yawn. But the moment the door closed behind the Colonel his languor vanished and he sat up with an expectant look upon his face.

Ten minutes later Williams entered. "Here's the key of the back stairs, sir," he said, handing it over. "He's in the young lady's room now, sir."

"Off you go then," returned Hood, pocketing the key. "Let me know when he comes out again."

Williams was back again almost immediately. "He's out now, sir," he grinned, "and gone up to his own room.

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He's got it hot, sir, for his hand was under his coat and he was swearing hard to himself."

Hood raced upstairs to his own room, fetched the jewel-box, and replaced it in the safe, which he re-locked, and, descending once more, sat down very contentedly in front of the great fire that blazed in the hall.

Presently Williams reappeared. "He came down, sir," he explained to Hood, "and tried the backstairs. Finding the door locked he went back to his room."

"Leave him there, then," said Hood. "It is unlikely that he will try this way before it grows dark. But keep within touch, for we must detain him by force, if necessary."

Four o'clock struck, and the short December day had already grown dark enough to justify the butler's query whether Mr. Hood would like the lamps lit.

"Not yet," answered Hood. "Wait till the people come."

He waited with some impatience until the clock chimed the half-hour. Then, as the noise of wheels and clatter of hoofs on the gravel announced that the house party and the sportsmen had arrived together, he sprang to his feet and hurried to the front door, where in the bustle of dismounting and greeting he managed to whisper to Gertrude: "Here is the key. Get the rubies when I ask for them."

He went airily out.

He had left her side before she could express her surprise at these singular instructions, and made his way to the dog-cart, from which two stalwart, well set-up men were descending. They were quietly dressed and there was nothing about them to indicate that they were not a couple of guests whom Sir Eustace had invited to the house.

He led the way into the library, where, after a short conversation, he left the two men and rejoined the party in the hall, which was now a blaze of light.

"What did you desert us for, Hood?" queried Sir Eustace, interrupting. "We had a splendid run. Where is Colonel Dubois?"

"In his room, I believe. He complained a good deal of the pain his leg gave him."

"Who is Colonel Dubois?" asked Lady Oliver. "I don't remember to have met him."

"Oh, a very good fellow indeed," said Sir Eustace. "I forget who introduced him to me. It was at—I forget where just now. But a good fellow—a capital fellow. Has travelled all over the world—fought his way through most of it, I believe. Very good company—tells a story better than anyone I ever heard, and——"

"Hush!" interposed Gertrude. "He is coming downstairs."

The Colonel seemed rather surprised to see so many people in the hall and half turned upon the first landing as though to re-ascend. He altered his mind, however, and continued his limping descent as Sir Eustace came forward to meet him with a cheery, "Well, Colonel, how is the leg?"

"So bad, I am sorry to say," was the answer, "that I was just coming in search of you to ask you to be good enough to let me have a carriage over to Great Marston. There is a train from there at a quarter to six, which I can catch and return to town."

"Don't go because you are afraid of giving trouble," urged Sir Eustace kindly. "We will make you as comfortable as we possibly can."

"You are most kind," murmured the Colonel. "But I know the symptoms too well. I am in for a regular bout of it and shall probably be laid up for a week or ten days. I should prefer to go. I should, indeed."

"Well, if you insist upon it," agreed his host, turning away, rather disappointed, to give the necessary order.

While the Colonel and Sir Eustace were conversing, Hood had slipped quietly upstairs. He now rejoined the group and addressed Dubois.

"Come and sit down, Colonel, till the carriage is ready," he urged. "You must not tire your leg." He drew the Colonel towards a chair, the back of which was immediately opposite to the library door.

The Colonel took the cup of tea with his left hand and set it upon his knees. His right hand was thrust deeply into the pocket of his coat.

"What is the matter with your hand, Colonel?" asked Hood. "I can see the end of a bandage. Have you an old wound there as well?"

The Colonel forced a laugh. "No," he answered; "a new one. I—the fact is—my wretched leg. I had a tumbler in my hand. I slipped to the floor. It broke and cut my fingers rather badly."

"What an unfortunate fellow you are, Dubois," said Sir Eustace. "Upon my word I'm sorry for you."

Somehow the Colonel looked very sorry for himself, nor did his face grow less sombre when Gertrude, who had slipped away for a moment in response to a whisper from Hood, returned with the jewel-box.

"You must see these before you go away, Colonel," she said, opening the box. "Confess, now, that you have never seen anything finer in the way of rubies."

"No," admitted Dubois, with something like a sigh, as the chorus of admiration arose. "Nothing, nothing—Ah! I am sure I hear the carriage."

"You are in a terrible hurry," said Sir Eustace. "You will have a long time to wait at the station if you start so soon. What did you say, Hood?"

"If the Colonel has time to listen to it," began Hood, "I can tell him a story about these particular gems which will interest him, since he has a partiality for gems in general. It so happened," he went on quickly, "that I had an uneasy feeling regarding the safety of the Marston rubies, so took it into my head to keep watch all last night in Miss Marston's boudoir. Nothing came of that watch, and this morning I asked Miss Marston for the key of the safe in which the gems were kept. I was still uneasy about them and I had a notion that there were rats in the house. Now, as everyone knows, rats have a terrible partiality for precious stones—sit down, Colonel, I shall soon have finished—therefore, I opened the safe, took out the casket, and substituted this." He drew one hand from behind his back, and held up before the eyes of the astonished company a steel rat trap, along the toothed grasp of which ran an ugly, dark stain.

There was an ominous pause. Gertrude, pale with

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terror, fastened her gaze upon Dubois, who had risen to his feet, and with his body bent slightly forward, glared ferociously at Hood, while his left hand crept slowly up to the breast of his coat.

"I caught something, as you see," continued Hood, keeping a wary eye upon the creeping hand. "And it must have been a large rat, too, for it walked off with the trap, and laid it in Colonel Dubois' room. *I hope you are not badly hurt, Colonel!*"

At the cue, for cue it was, there was a sudden rush from the library, the Colonel's dangerous left hand was struck swiftly down to his side, his wounded right wrenched with little ceremony from his pocket. Something gleamed in the firelight, there was a sharp click, and Lucy's Viking stood a handcuffed prisoner between Hood's two mysterious friends.

"Thank you, gentlemen," said Hood. "That was well and neatly done. Now, Anatole Baptiste, alias Colonel Dubois, alias I don't know how many more high-sounding names and titles, I think you will admit that your very pretty plot to carry off the Marston rubies has been foiled."

"God bless me!" exclaimed Sir Eustace. "Hood, what are you thinking of? Colonel, what does this mean? Dear me, a gentleman whom I met at—Where was it I met you, Colonel? and who was introduced by no less a person than—Who was it? I can't for the life of me remember. But—but—there must be a mistake somewhere. Colonel Dubois, why don't you speak? Can't you explain?"

Dubois had recovered his *sangfroid*. "I am as much at a loss as you can be, Sir Eustace," he said. "I see that I am indebted to Mr. Hood for my present uncomfortable position; but what is his charge? Am I supposed to have stolen gems, which at present lie upon the table? Mr. Hood must be out of his senses to suggest such a thing. Be kind enough to remove these handcuffs," he added to the detectives at his side. But they only smiled knowingly.

"You had better catch the train," said Everard, "or you will have to spend the night here; but first——" He made a sign, and while one of the men rapidly "went through" the Colonel, the other ransacked his portmanteau, which stood upon a chair hard by.

"Nothing but this, sir," said the man who had searched the Colonel, and handed a small ring case to Hood, who passed it on to Gertrude.

"My mother's ring!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Everard, and but for you I should have lost everything!"

"Bless me!" gasped Sir Eustace again as the second detective produced from the portmanteau several jewel-cases and a choice selection of the family plate. "You rascal!" he cried, turning upon the Colonel. "You rascally thief! I—I—oh! if only I could remember the name of the other rascal who foisted you upon me, I'd —I'd——"

Dubois laughed. "You've had no reason to regret the introduction, Sir Eustace," he said coolly. "You have got the best of me so far, Mr. Hood. That was a scurvy trick to play though, and I own I did not give you credit for so much ingenuity. I attributed this little accident to Miss Marston's cleverness." He held up his hands with a bow and a smile towards Gertrude. "Well, no matter, I shall not be in for ever on account of a trifle like this, and when I come out again, look to yourself, Mr. Hood." He laughed in a rather ugly fashion.

"You will have plenty of time for deliberation, Monsieur Baptiste," answered Hood; "for when we have done with you on this side, I expect the French police will present you with a little account for settlement. Indeed, I should not be surprised if they urged a prior claim." Then to the detectives: "You had better be off. You will only just do it."

"Good-bye!" cried the Colonel as he moved off between the two men. "A merry Christmas to you all when it comes. Drink my health at dinner to-night, Sir Eustace, will you? Miss Lucy, I am sure we should have become good friends but for this untoward accident. Miss Marston, I feel almost repaid for my ill luck by the knowledge that I was not the means of inflicting pain upon so charming a lady as yourself. Good-night! Good-night!" And he went airily out.

"The smooth-tongued rascal!" said Sir Eustace, as the door closed behind Dubois and his guards. "How could I have been such a fool! Hood, I don't know what I owe you. How did you discover the fellow's game?"

"Mr. Hood will demand payment in full before long, or I am much mistaken," whispered Lucy to Lady Oliver, with a roguish glance at Gertrude.

"Well," replied Hood, "I happened to be in Paris three years ago when Anatole Baptiste, or Colonel Dubois as he called himself here, was sentenced to deportation for a cleverly executed jewel robbery. I was present at the trial when the sentence was passed and was much struck with the appearance and cultured style of the prisoner. I learnt later that he was a man of good education and respectable parentage, though, evidently, his talents had been perverted. The man's personality was so marked that it impressed itself on my memory, and though I never heard of his escape, and though he had dyed his hair and moustache"—"Oh, my Viking," sighed Lucy in Gertrude's ear—"I knew him at once when we met at the railway station yesterday. You may have noticed his irritation at my reference to Cayenne last night. That, and the way in which he brought the conversation round to the rubies after dinner, made me doubly sure, and I determined to watch him. I gave him no opportunity to play any tricks during my absence from the house this morning, and I kept him in play till it was almost time for the detectives to arrive, having made matters easy for him by leaving the key in the safe."

"What amazes me is that, knowing you were in the house, he ventured to make the attempt at all," said Lady Oliver.

"I imagine he merely intended to spy out the land and lay his plans," answered Hood; "but the temptation of an open safe was too much for him, as I thought."

The company dispersed, some upstairs, some to the smoking-room, and Gertrude, with a backward glance at Everard, entered the library. Before he could follow her, Lucy sped after her friend.

"Gertrude," she whispered, "are you not an arrant humbug? Confess, now, it is all settled."

"Well, I suppose I may as well admit that it is," said Gertrude with a blush.

Lucy shook a merry finger at her. "Oh, my poor Viking!" she cried. "I can't help feeling sorry for him; he looked so splendid. And you told me, Gertrude, that Mr. Hood was not your ideal."

"I don't believe I did," returned Gertrude, smiling at Everard, who just then entered the room; "but at all events, you will admit that I have found an excellent substitute for yours."

REGINALD HORSLEY.

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Impedimenta.

In the chaos of trunks upon the steamship dock, the portmanteau and the Saratoga trunk found themselves side by side. Under the circumstances it was awkward; but the portmanteau belonged to a man of the world, and difficult positions were his *forte*.

The ice must be broken; and the portmanteau made the first plunge.

"I believe we have met before, mademoiselle?" he remarked to the trunk.

"I should not have thought," rather coldly replied the Saratoga, "that you would care to recall the circumstances. They were, at the least, distinctly painful."

"You allude, mademoiselle, to the episode of our two proprietors? That was undoubtedly painful: but I cannot see why it should affect our relations."

The Saratoga trunk was silent for a moment, and then answered in mollified tones: "You are right, monsieur. Our owners' love quarrel need not extend to us. We are not in love."

"Mademoiselle must speak for herself," said the portmanteau gallantly. "By-the-way, the first scene of that unhappy drama occurred——"

"At Waterloo Station. You remember, he intended crossing with her to New York, and settling their difficulties *en route*. But she cut him dead at the station."

"I remember," cried the portmanteau. "She was superintending your transfer to the luggage-van at the time. I lay on the platform ready and labelled: but after her cruel behaviour he had me sent back to the hotel. Two days after we left London for the East."

"Ah, the dear East! It was there we met first, was it not?"

"Yes; at Shepheard's Hotel. My master was coming back from India, and of course he had to see Cairo."

"And we belonged to a party of globe-trotting Americans on a Nile voyage. I remember being placed next you on the verandah at Shepheard's. My mistress stole a look at your labels; and I heard her say to her married sister: 'This valise belongs to a Captain Richard Assheton. I wonder what he is like, and why he spells his name with a double "s."'"

"The idea of calling me a valise! So American?" interjected the portmanteau. "Still your mistress was a very charming young woman, and deliciously sprightly."

"She is charming still, though scarcely so sprightly. Do you knew, *mon cher*, I actually believe that she felt that episode sadly."

The portmanteau sniffed impatiently. "Then why did she act so?" he exclaimed. "It was all her fault."

"Nothing of the kind," the Saratoga retorted. "It was the fault of your Captain Assheton"

There was another silence, broken by the portmanteau. "Well," he said, "we need not quarrel about it. I remember when my master saw your mistress first. He asked a servant her name; and I heard him repeating several times: 'By Jove! This Miss Carrie Dunham is a deucedly pretty girl!'"

"It certainly showed his good taste. She noticed him, too; because I heard her talking about him to her sister. Then they met on the excursion to the Grand Pyramid."

"So I heard. And the acquaintance ripened into his joining the party."

The Saratoga tittered. "I can recall the tender fashion in which he looked after me at Port Said," she murmured. "You were quite neglected, *mon ami*."

"Oh, but Miss Dunham kept me in mind. I can still hear her begging the Captain not to 'forget his dear old portmanteau.'"

"The first proposal occurred at Malta. She came down to the state room and told the whole story to her sister. She was sitting on me at the time."

"She had put him on probation. I heard him tell his friend McClean. He was to meet her in London and receive her final answer. Ah, that answer! How can you females act so cruelly?"

"Cruelly, monsieur? Nonsense! My dear mistress had no alternative but to act so after the conduct of Captain Assheton."

The portmanteau was astounded, and said so. "I cannot penetrate your meaning," he cried.

"Your nation, monsieur, is proverbially slow of comprehension. But it is surely hypocritical on your part to pretend a lack of knowledge of your master's frailties. You must be well aware that in Paris he so far forgot his alleged love for my mistress as to pay court to Mdlle. Fanny Patte-en-haut at the Folies Bergères. Nay, did he not present that notorious creature with a gorgeous diamond tiara in full view of the audience. My mistress's brother-in-law was in the audience, and saw him do it."

The portmanteau uttered a sharp exclamation. "And such," he said, "was the reason why Miss Dunham rejected my master when he came to London, refusing all explanation; and why she subsequently cut him dead at Waterloo Station?"

"Such was the reason," tartly answered the Saratoga; "and a very sound reason, too, so far as I can see."

The portmanteau burst into a fit of laughter, much to his companion's disgust. Long and vigorously he laughed, ceasing at last only from sheer exhaustion.

"And now," said the trunk, "perhaps, monsieur, you will be good enough to explain the cause of your—your cachinnatory hysteria."

"What a clever trunk you must be, mademoiselle, to use such long words! Anyone can see that you came from Boston. The cause of my merriment, eh? Well, I was laughing over the very ridiculous mistake made by your mistress and her donkey of a brother-in-law."

"Mistake, monsieur?"

"Certainly. The superb tiara which my master gave to poor little Fanny Patte-en-haut did not belong to him at all. He was merely an instrument in the presentation. The tiara was a gift from the Rajah of Bundleapore, who had seen Fanny the previous summer in Paris. He sent the diamonds to her from India in the care of his friend, Captain Assheton; I ought to know

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because they were stowed away inside me all the way from Madras. The whole story was in the Parisian papers at the time; and if your mistress's brother-in-law had taken the trouble to read them——"

"He does not speak or read French, poor fellow."

"Ah, that explains it. And so, because of his ignorance, two young hearts are to be severed and two happy lives blighted in their prime!"

"It is very sad!" sighed the Saratoga sympathetically.

"Sad? By Jove! mademoiselle. It is criminal. But let us consider. Is there no way by which things may be set right? Here we are about to enter the United States together. I am labelled for Newport."

"And so am I. Dear me, Monsieur Portmanteau, I never wished that I had the power of human speech so fervently as I do now! I should lose no time in apprising my dear mistress of that hideous mistake about Fanny Patte-en-haut."

"Human speech is out of the question," said the portmanteau. "We must hit upon some other scheme. Ah, I have it!"

"Monsieur, you are a genius."

"You flatter me, mademoiselle. And yet the plan is not a bad one. This morning, as Banks was packing me, he wrapped some novels in an old newspaper and placed them right under my lid, on top of everything else. I can feel them there now. What, think you, was the newspaper used?"

"Indeed, I cannot guess," said the Saratoga.

"It was a copy of the *Gaulois*, containing a full account of the presentation of Fanny Patte-en-haut on behalf of the Rajah of Bundleapore. I am sure, because Banks read it over with a reminiscent chuckle before he wrapped it round the novels."

"But how about your plan?"

"Is it possible that you have not surmised my plan? In a few minutes the Customs House people will come along. I shall simply slip when they open me, and cause those novels and the *Gaulois* in which they are wrapped to fall in your direction. You can roll over slightly and possess yourself of the newspaper. When your mistress, or that perky French maid of hers, comes along, take care that she notices the *Gaulois*; and leave the rest to fortune."

"A good plan, monsieur; but too much is left to fortune, I fear. And here come the Customs House officials, with Mr. Banks to open you. Now for it!"

The portmanteau strained himself with excitement, until his straps creaked again.

II.

THE Customs House inspection was in progress. Miss Dunham and Capt. Richard Assheton stood near their respective heaps of luggage, while the latter's valet and the former's maid attended more directly to the matters in hand.

As Clarisse, the maid in question, was about to unlock the Saratoga trunk, her quick eyes caught sight of a newspaper lying on the dock floor.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "*Le Gaulois!* It is a good omen, this message from *la patrie*."

She raised the paper and, glancing at the year-old headings, was about to throw it away again, when an article in the centre column arrested her attention. She read it carefully to the end with an astonished little "*Mon Dieu!*" and "*Ma foi!*" at every sentence. Finally, forgetting all about the Customs officials she tripped towards her mistress, newspaper in hand.

"Oh, mademoiselle! What an occurrence! What a providence!" she exclaimed, pointing to the article in the *Gaulois*. It was a long article, and it described in truly Gallic fashion the presentation to Mdlle. Patte-en-haut from H.S.H. the Rajah of Bundleapore, through the medium of the Rajah's obliging friend, Capt. Richard Assheton.

Miss Dunham gasped when she read this revelation. Then her fine eyes filled with tears and she turned sadly to her maid.

"Oh, Clarisse!" she whispered. "And I refused him for that, and cut him so cruelly at Waterloo last year, and—and travelled all the way over in the same ship without speaking to him once. And all the time I have loved him. What shall I do, Clarisse?"

Here Miss Dunham sank back upon the dock railing.

Clarisse's eyes brightened. "*Mon Dieu!*" she cried, "I have a scheme. If mademoiselle will only consent to a little innocent deception—a little private theatricals, as it were—all will be well."

"I will do anything in reason," sobbed Miss Dunham.

"*Eh bien!* Does mademoiselle observe her Saratoga trunk yonder. Good; mademoiselle must pretend to faint, and fall back upon the trunk. It will not hurt, as I can catch mademoiselle as she falls. Naturally M. le Capitaine will see, and, being a gallant gentleman, he will come to the rescue. Leave the rest to me."

Miss Dunham bit her lip. She did not like the scheme.

"It is the only way," whispered Clarisse, the tempter. "Otherwise the last chance is gone."

Miss Dunham yielded; and a few minutes later the bustle of that section of the dock was interrupted by the fainting of a young and beautiful lady.

As fast as his legs could carry him, Captain Assheton reached the Saratoga trunk and its precious burden. Clarisse gazed at him tearfully.

"Ah, M. le Capitaine!" she murmured. "It is all about you."

"About me!" said Assheton gruffly. "Can't see why my presence should make her faint, considering we came over together without exchanging a word."

Clarisse held out the newspaper, "*Voila!*" she exclaimed. "It is only this minute that mademoiselle learnt the true story of that affair at the Folies Bergères."

Then, while eagerly chafing her mistress's face and hands, she poured into Assheton's ears the whole story of the mistaken brother-in-law and the natural error of Miss Dunham.

Just as the narrative ended, Miss Dunham opened her eyes. They met those of Capt. Assheton.

"Carrie!" said the Captain. "Is this true? This about the mistake?"

"Oh, Dick!" cried Miss Dunham, "it is quite true. How can you ever forgive me?"

It was at this point that Capt. Richard Assheton relieved Mdlle. Clarisse, and assisted Miss Dunham to a cab.

* * * * *

"Well?" said the portmanteau to the Saratoga trunk, as they were being hoisted into the same waggon. "How did my little plan come off?"

"Ah, *mon cher!*" cried the trunk ecstatically. "It was admirable. There will be a wedding before Advent."

"And then we shall always travel together, you and I?"

But the Saratoga trunk was coy, and answered not.

GERALD BRENAN.

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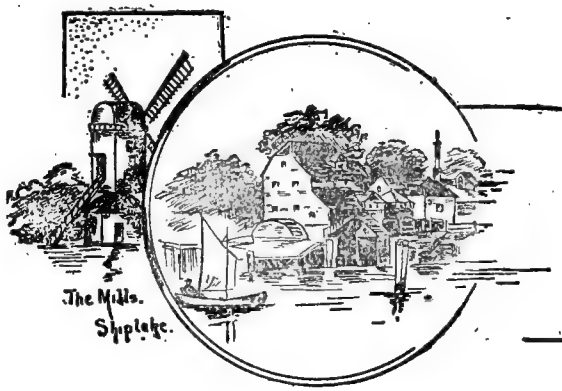

NONA LE MAQUET.

Some years ago I passed several weeks at a fishing village on the coast of Brittany. What a hole it was! But how picturesque! A miserable anchorage, for ten boats at the most; a single stony street, which I can compare to nothing better than a mountain torrent. On top of the hill, a church, a veritable gothic toy, which stood in the middle of a cemetery from which a magnificent view of the ocean was obtained. Finding myself in the vein for work, I lingered in this out-of-the-way corner until the end of the month of September, which by a rare chance in rainy Finisterre was, that year, exceptionally mild and clear.

But one cannot always compose verses and write, and a walk was my hygiene and my distraction. My most frequent promenade was along the beach, having on my right the bleak and rocky cliffs, and on my left the uncovered stretches of sand—an immense desert of sand, left bare by the out-going tide.

Two or three times I had exchanged civilities with some Custom House officer going his rounds, his gun slung over his shoulder. I was so regular and peaceful a promenader that the sea swallows were no longer afraid of me, and hopped in front of me, leaving the print of their star-shaped feet in the wet sand. I walked six or eight kilometres a day, and returned home with my pockets filled with those dainty shells which are found by burying the hand deep down in the damp pebbles.

This was my favourite excursion. However, on the days when a strong breeze was blowing, and the tide was very high, I abandoned the sea-shore, and, climbing the village street, I strolled along the sandy moor, or else I settled myself with a book on a bench in a corner of the cemetery, which was sheltered by the church tower from the west end.

It was a lovely spot, conducive to sadness and reverie. The church tower stood out against the autumn sky, over which dark clouds were scurrying. Crows, whose nests were in the steeple, flew out with their hoarse cawing, and the shadow of their large wings glided over the scattered tombstones, almost hidden in the grass.

In the evening more than at any other time, the last rays of the setting sun, bathing the sea as though with blood, the ragged branches of the skeleton of an old apple tree, silhouetted against the crimson sky, and the deep, intense stillness of the wild home of the dead flooded my soul with melancholy.

It was on such an evening as I have just described, that wandering among the tombs, many of which bore under the sailor's name this mournful legend, "Died at Sea," that I read on a new cross the following words, which astonished and puzzled me:

Here Reposes
NONA LE MAQUET.
Died at sea, October 26th, 1873, at the age of nineteen.

Died at sea. A young girl! Women hardly ever go out in the fishing boats. How did this happen?

"Well, monsieur," said a gruff voice behind me suddenly. "You are looking at poor Nona's tomb?"

I turned round and recognised an old sailor, with a wooden leg, whose good graces I had acquired by the aid of a few glasses of brandy, which I had given him in the tap-room at the inn.

"Yes," I replied. "But I thought that you fishermen never permitted women to go out with you? I have even been told that they bring you misfortune."

"And that is the truth," responded the good man. "Besides, Nona never went into a boat. Would you like to know how the poor little one died? Well, I will relate the story to you.

"First of all, I must tell you that Pierre, her father, was a top-man, like myself, and an old comrade. At Bourget, when Admiral La Ronciere raised his golden helmet on the point of his sword, and we flung ourselves, hatchet in hand, on the embattled houses, we marched elbow to elbow, Pierre and I, and it was he who received me in his arms when those cursed Prussians put a ball in my thigh.

"That same evening, in the ambulance at the fort, Pierre held my hand to give me courage while the surgeon amputated my limb; and he was there at my bed-side when the Admiral brought me my medal. But those rascally Prussians got the best of us, and we were sent home. I, with my wooden leg, was practically helpless. But Pierre, who was uninjured, went on board a fishing smack. Very soon afterwards his wife died from an intermittent fever, leaving him the care of little Nona, who was getting on for ten years of age.

"Naturally, while the widower was at sea, it was I, his comrade, I, the old bachelor, who cared for the little one. She was a good and pretty child, monsieur; courageous and sweet-tempered. We very often went to the rocks at low tide to gather mussels, shrimps, prawns, and sometimes we were fortunate enough to find a lobster. Ah! but we were good friends.

"This went on for about two years. Nona had made her first communion, grown and shot up like a thistle in the sand. But one day, the *Amelia*, le Maquet's boat, was overtaken in a storm and wrecked. The skipper did not haul in his sail soon enough, and the boat struck on

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that reef you can see over there; just a little more to the starboard. There were four men in the crew—the skipper, two sailors, and my poor Pierre. But the sea only gave up three of the drowned men, and retained my comrade. Nona became an orphan. It goes without saying that I did my best to replace her father.

"But the child, even after the first sorrow passed away, did not seem to console herself. And, do you know why, monsieur? Because of an idea all the women around here have. They believe that a soul must remain in pain unto the Judgment Day unless it reposes in consecrated ground. We men do not believe in all this nonsense when we know what happens when there is a death on board ship. But Nona could not be forced to believe other than the women had taught her, and continued to burn candles at all the Bardons in the neighbouring towns for the repose of her father's soul.

"However, in spite of everything, Time is a famous merchant of forgetfulness, and Nona, after a few years, appeared to me to become somewhat reconciled. Besides, her grief had not prevented her from growing handsomer and taking a pride in herself, and it is not because I loved her like a father, but, upon my honour, she was the freshest and prettiest young girl in the parish. We lived so happily together. We were not rich, to be sure, but we lived and we enjoyed ourselves all the same. I had my pension and my medal, and then we used to go together to hunt for lobsters in the rocks. The trade is a paying one, and there is only one danger, that of being overtaken by the tide. Ah, unfortunately that was how she met her death, poor little one!

"One day, when my rheumatism confined me to the house, she went fishing alone. It was just such a day as to-day, the sky clear, the wind high. When the rock searchers gathered together with full baskets, they perceived that Nona failed to respond to their calls. There was no possible doubt. Great God! she had been delayed and surrounded by the rising tide. She had been drowned! Ah! what a night I passed, monsieur! At my age, yes, a hard-hearted man like me, I sobbed like a woman. And the remembrance came to me of the poor child's belief that to go to heaven she must be interred in consecrated ground. Therefore, as soon as the tide went down, I went to the shore, and with others searched for the body.

"And we found my poor Nona," continued the old sailor, in a trembling voice. "We found her on a rock covered with seaweed, where knowing that she was going to die the poor little one had prepared herself for death. Yes, monsieur, she had tied her skirts below her knees with her fichu, through modesty, and, with her old idea uppermost, had attached herself to the seaweed by her hair, her beautiful black hair, certain that she would be found and interred in consecrated ground. And I can say, I, who know what bravery is, that there is, perhaps, not a man brave enough to do likewise."

FRANÇOIS COPPÉE.

THE TAIL OF A KITE.

OLD Pierre Bernard was hammering away on the sole of a shoe. He was a cobbler and occupied a small shop on the outskirts of a city. His family consisted of himself and grandson, little Pierre, who was ten years of age. Behind the shop was a room which served as a parlour, bed-room, and kitchen. The cooking was done by Bernard himself, who possessed some knowledge of the culinary art.

Old Pierre's reputation was not of the best; though he had never been detected in a really dishonest act, he was known to be tricky. But he had a genial manner, was always ready to talk, and his shop became a rendezvous for male gossips who liked to chat about the affairs of the day. On this particular morning two of the fraternity sauntered in.

"Good-morning, Pierre," said Caleb Gibson. "How's business?"

"Bad," answered Bernard, shaking his head. "I can't compete with store prices, and it is a hard matter to keep body and soul together."

"Body and soul, eh?" said Caleb, chuckling at his attempt at wit. "You must see that the soul keeps the body while it lasts."

Pierre laughed as he gave the shoe a resounding blow with his hammer. He always laughed at other men's jokes, however poor they might be; this was one of the secrets of his popularity. Presently Silas Parker remarked:

"Odd about the robbery, isn't it?"

"What robbery?"

"Haven't you read of it in the papers?" Silas asked in surprise.

"I have no time to read papers."

"Well, it happened last night up at the Hall. Madame Benton's pearl necklace was stolen. They say it was very valuable, and so long that it could be wound several times about her neck. The detectives are working up the case."

"Have they any clue to the thief?" Pierre asked carelessly.

"Well a slight one. They found a bit of cloth—what is the matter?" he broke off in alarm, as a cry escaped Bernard.

"Oh, I pounded my finger a little, that's all."

"You must have hurt it badly, you are quite pale."

"No, no!" Pierre answered quickly. "It is nothing. Go on with your story. You were saying that they found a bit of cloth."

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"Yes—a small zigzag piece, evidently torn from a coat. It was hanging on a nail."

"Well," said Pierre deliberately, "I hope the robber will escape."

"Why?" exclaimed Silas, in amazement. "For my part I hope he will be brought to justice."

"Justice!" said Bernard testily. "Is there such a thing?"

"There is law, anyway, and if we commit a crime we must suffer for it."

"If we are poor—yes. But the rich contrive to escape the punishment, whatever they may do."

"I don't know," murmured Silas dubiously, while Caleb shook his head.

"Well, I do," said Pierre vehemently. "A rich man obtains money dishonestly; the transaction is called by a polite name People shrug their shoulders and pass on; but let a beggar steal a loaf of bread to keep him from starving, and he is thrust into prison without much ado. Bah! It is a strange world."

He tossed his hammer down, and it fell with a crash.

"Oh, I've heard about the beggar and his loaf before," said Silas. "But I never believed in him. We have hands to work with, and can always earn our bread by honest toil. You're out of humour to-day, Bernard. Come, Caleb, we must be off. Good-day, Pierre."

"Good-day," answered Bernard, without looking at them.

That night he took a bundle from his cupboard and went stealthily into his small garden. Digging a hole in the yielding ground he deposited the bundle in it then filled it up, packing the earth so tightly down that it was impossible to discover it had been recently disturbed. Little Pierre lay sleeping in the inner room, but some noise awakening him he crept from his bed and peeped into the shop just as his grandfather returned.

"Go to bed!" Bernard commanded sharply, as he closed the outer door. "What are you doing here?"

"I thought I heard a noise," answered the child.

"So did I, and I went to see what caused it. It was nothing. Go to bed again, and I will make you a kite, a marvellous kite, which you may fly to-morrow."

"Oh, will you, grandfather? Jolly! Now I'll go at once," cried the delighted boy.

A smile curved Bernard's lips as he gathered together the materials for the kite. It took several hours to complete it, but when finished it was indeed a thing of beauty. It was full four feet in height, and there were many coloured papers used in its construction; a fringe adorned the outer edge. But the tail was the most wonderful of all. A long string formed the foundation, and upon it were fastened pieces of cloth of graduating lengths, the longest being at the top, and tapering down to a mere shred at the end. Each was twisted in the centre, the ends being allowed to fly, but so closely were they put on the string that scarcely any part of it was visible.

Little Pierre rose early the next morning. His impatience was so great that he could scarcely contain himself until his grandfather should give him the kite; but he dare not express his wish as Bernard seemed excited and nervous, an unusual thing with him. The boy wondered why he stood at the door so long, gazing anxiously about, returning to his work only to repeat the performance a few minutes later. At last he turned to the expectant child:

"Come," he said, "you shall fly the kite."

"Oh, is it not beautiful?" Pierre cried, clasping his hands in admiration when the wonderful thing was held up for his inspection.

This Pretty Girl is a Reader of ☞ "HOME NOTES."

He was wild to touch it, but Bernard would not permit him to do so, and bade him hold the cord while he held the kite aloft himself. Soon it floated upward, the tail resembling a flock of birds as it straightened in the breeze.

"You are Pierre Bernard, I believe," said someone.

As Bernard moved quickly, he came face to face with two men.

"That is my name," he answered. "What is your business with me?"

One of the detectives, for such they were, eyed him sharply, as he said:

"We have orders to search your house, Bernard."

"For what?"

"We are looking for a necklace which was stolen from Madame Benton."

"And do you suppose I have it?" demanded Pierre, with a great show of anger. "How dare you accuse me of stealing? But go—search the house—and if you find it——"

He finished with a harsh laugh.

"The old fellow takes it coolly," said one of the men. "But come—let us get the business over." And they went to work, searching every nook and corner of the house for some signs of the missing property.

Meanwhile, Bernard was apparently absorbed in the kite, and laughed loudly as it rose higher and higher, the long tail curving and twitching like a snake. Presently it began to descend, and a shade of excitement was visible on his face, while little Pierre cried out in dismay:

"Oh, grandfather, it is coming down and will get caught in those trees."

"We will prevent that," said Bernard, with a furtive glance at the house; and he loosened the cord to its fullest extent. But the kite steadily descended. It hovered over a tree for a few seconds, then fell, the tail becoming entangled in the branches. Bernard gave the cord a sharp pull, and the kite dropped at his feet.

Little Pierre ran and picked it up, dragging the kite back to where the old man stood.

"The tail is broken, grandfather," he exclaimed. "Oh, why did you hide these pretty beads? See——"

He spoke no further, for Bernard with an oath sprang forward and snatched the kite from his hand. At the same instant one of the detectives, who had approached unnoticed, tore it from him.

"Ah! we are not mistaken after all," he said, holding up the tail for his companion's inspection.

Beneath each of the twisted rags was a small cluster of pearls.

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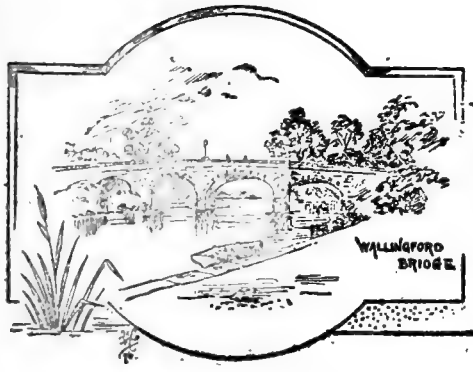

ALMOST A MONOLOGUE.

MAJOR HUGHES and Captain Rhodes were sitting smoking before a blazing open fire in Major Hughes' cosy library. Between them was a small table that held a few books and a box of choice cigars. Major Hughes was dark, tall and lean, slightly bald, with a stoop in his shoulders and an expression as of lately conquered querulousness on his face. Captain Rhodes was rather short, decidedly rotund, very bald, very erect, and looked as if he had been in the best of good humours all his life.

"Well," said Major Hughes, with a satisfied air, "I believe that I have already said that I was glad to see you."

"Yes," said Captain Rhodes, beaming on Major Hughes. "Once or twice; but it's one of those things that you can't hear too often. You're looking well—better than I ever saw you—and so is your house. I didn't know you had much taste in that line. You certainly kept it under a bushel when we kept bachelor's hall at Fort Reno. You must have a good housekeeper."

"I have," said Major Hughes, with a suppressed smile. "So good that I have got almost rid of dyspepsia. That was the curse of my life."

"That's good," said Captain Rhodes heartily. "Now tell me all about yourself. I haven't heard a word from you since I left the army."

"No," said Major Hughes, "I'm not much of a correspondent; but a man who falls heir to a fortune and resigns, and goes to Egypt for five years, doesn't deserve to hear from his friends. Aren't you afraid you will scorch, sitting so close to the fire? Do you think it's cold?"

"Not in here," said Captain Rhodes, pushing his chair back a little, "but it's only twelve degrees above zero out of doors."

"Speaking of cold," said Major Hughes musingly, "reminds me of an experience I had at Fort Keogh when I was on duty in Canada. You know I went there the year after you resigned, when I got my promotion."

"No, I didn't know it," said Captain Rhodes, "but go on."

"Well, you probably remember that I didn't like women?"

"Yes," said Captain Rhodes, smiling, "and that, with the inconsistency of all eccentrics, you read novels all the time—novels wherein heroes were of no importance, but that abounded in a varied assortment of the most remarkable heroines."

"Yes, I got enough of women that way. The real thing always bored me, or embarrassed me, I don't know which; and you can imagine what a brilliant prospect there was for me when I got to my new station and found that there wasn't a single unmarried officer there, with the exception of five or six youngsters, and they didn't want a rusty, fusty old major poking round with them. To make bad enough worse, there were dozens of little children about. The place fairly resounded with baby talk—the one thing that I abominated above all others.

"If I had had a controlling voice in army regulations, I wouldn't have allowed officers to marry. I hung about by myself for a month or so, getting more and more morose all the time. Of course I returned visits, but I selected times when I knew the wives were out. One night, though, I got caught. I had heard that there was to be a ladies' card party, so I trotted round to see Wilhelm—we were room-mates once, and I had always liked him. He opened the door himself, and I shouted out at the top of my voice: 'Hello, old man, I've come to spend the evening with you,' and then I stepped into the hall and saw Mrs. Wilhelm sitting in the parlour.

"I was utterly taken aback, but it was too late to beat a retreat, so I shuffled in and shook hands with her. She received me cordially, not appearing to notice my embarrassment, and, to my surprise, I soon found myself at ease, and having a very pleasant time. After that I got into the habit of going there. Mrs. Wilhelm was clever and bright, but she wasn't always doing the fire-work act, the way most clever women do, trying to dazzle people. She talked sensibly, and when she saw that Wilhelm and I were interested in some topic that she didn't care to discuss with us, she wouldn't try to make us switch off—she would just sit down at the piano and play something soft that didn't thrust itself on our notice, but that, somehow, always had the effect of making us feel in charity with all men.

"But it was all changed when their daughter came home from school. Great Scott! what a whirlwind that girl was!—and spoiled!—She was spoiled to the verge of disintegration. She was only about so high"—holding his hand five feet from the floor—"and her hair and eyes were as black as coal, and she was fairly insolently healthy and full of life. She ruined the Wilhelm's house for me. In the first place, all the youngsters in the garrison swarmed about her—the house was always full of them—and if she happened to be by herself, and came in and found Wilhelm and me absorbed in some discussion, she would say: 'Oh, you're talking some stupid *man* talk!' and she would rush to the piano—she rushed at everything she did—and bang some horrible brass band piece, or sing a college song at the top of her voice, with the loud pedals on.

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"It was awful. And the Wilhelms thought she was perfect.

"One day, early in November, I had one of my attacks of the blues. I ordered my horse in hopes of riding it down. It was lovely when I started—warm enough to make my overcoat entirely superfluous, but my striker, who had served in that country for years, begged me to let him put it on behind the saddle. He said that he knew that a change was coming on, and that I would need it if I stayed out long. I let him do it just to humour him. I rode along over the lowlands, with those dreary buttes all around me, and away off to the right the narrow belt of cotton-wood trees that edged the river.

"I had gone about twelve miles, getting bluer and bluer each step, when suddenly an icy wind slapped me in the face. It felt just as if a frozen sheet had struck me and wrapped around me. I looked up, and the sky was like ink, but on the horizon was a white wall that reached from earth to heaven, and that was moving towards me at the rate of a mile a minute. I turned round and started for home at a gallop, but before I had gone half a mile the blinding snow had caught up with me, and it was so thick that I couldn't see three feet ahead. The wind seemed to be coming from every direction at once. It almost swept me from the saddle.

"I saw that I was in for it, so I dismounted and put on my overcoat. My horse was frightened and jumped about, tugging at the reins, and when I was ready to mount, I couldn't tell to save my life which way to turn. It seemed suicidal to stand still in that piercing wind, that was growing colder every instant, yet it was folly to go on, for I realised that I was probably increasing the distance between myself and the garrison at every step. However, I pushed on, hoping that I was going in the right direction, and trying to make myself believe that the storm would soon be over, and that I could find my way home before dark. After half-an-hour or so of this struggle against the storm, I became aware of a dark object that loomed up suddenly through the snow. I stood still and waited. As it came nearer I saw that it was someone on a big horse. You can imagine my sensations when I discovered that it was Wilhelm's daughter.

"'What on earth are you doing here?' I said, going up to her. She started violently when I spoke, for she had had her head bent almost to the horse's neck, and had not seen me, then she said: 'Oh, Major Hughes, is it you? I never thought I *could* be so glad to see—anyone.' She had evidently meant to say 'you,' and changed it for politeness' sake at the last minute. 'But what are you doing so far from the post alone?' I said. 'Does your father know about it?'

"She said: 'No, I didn't tell him where I was going.'

"'I have often heard him tell you not to go more than a mile away from home,' I said severely; 'this is twelve, if it's an inch.'

"'Well, and does it concern you?' she said snappishly.

"I did not answer her, and we rode on in silence a short distance. Then she said in a conciliatory tone, 'I'm awfully glad that I met you. I was lost. I hadn't an idea of which way to go.'

"'Neither have I,' I said.

"'Oh!' she said, looking at me with big, scared eyes; and she pressed her horse close to mine.

"'We might as well dismount,' I said, after a while 'we will wear our horses out to no purpose ranging about in this way.' I got down and reached up my hands to help her out of the saddle.

"'Oh, I'm so stiff,' she said, 'really I can't jump.'

"I had to lift her down. I could feel her shaking and shivering. She was very small, but my arms were absolutely brittle from cold, and I felt that her weight would break them. I unsaddled the horses and then told her to hold them—for there was nothing to tie them to—while I built her a snow house.

"She took the reins mechanically, her eyes fastened on my face.

"'Won't we be able to find the way home?' she said in a moment, her voice trembling.

"'I'm afraid not,' I said.

"Just then a blast even fiercer than the rest struck us. The horses plunged, broke away from her, and in an instant were out of sight. She leaped after them—then, realising the hopelessness of such a chase, she stopped and turned towards me.

"'We—will—freeze—to—death,' she said slowly, utter despair in her voice. Then she began to cry out loud.

"I didn't know what to do. In those confounded novels the women always held their heads high in times of danger, and said: 'I fear naught,' or some such lofty thing.

"'Oh, stop!' I said crossly. I hadn't an idea of how to deal with her.

"'I won't!' she said, and went on worse than ever. I felt that I would go crazy if she kept it up. Then I remembered a ruse that always worked successfully with my little nieces and nephews, and I said grimly; 'You'd better stop—the wolves will hear you.'

"She uttered the most awful shriek that I ever heard in my life, and before I knew what had happened, her arms were around me, so tight that I was almost cut in two, and she was crying: 'Oh, save me! save me! Don't let them eat me up!'

"I wished that I had let her cry in peace. I wriggled and twisted, but I couldn't get loose.

"'Let go!' I shouted at last. 'How can I keep you from being killed if you hold me in this way?'

"I finally persuaded her to sit down on my saddle blanket, while I heaped snow round her to break the wind. She looked so little, and so blue with cold, that it occurred to me at last that she had no wrap on. I reluctantly took off my overcoat—yes—I was a brute, but I didn't like her, and I begrudged it to her—and wrapped her up in it. She thanked me, with her teeth chattering, and shivered down into it, and I went on piling snow. I thought every minute that I would freeze solid and fall down dead. I never suffered so in my life. After a while she raised her face and said: 'Major Hughes, aren't you cold without your coat?'

"It exasperated me beyond endurance.

"'Oh, no, I feel as though I were in a bake-house,' I said, with a brutal laugh.

"She jumped up like a flash, tore off the coat, and threw it at my feet.

"'*Take* your old coat!' she cried. 'You horrible—you horrible—oh, you *coward!*' and then she flung herself down on the snow, and writhed and screamed and sobbed.

"I was furious, but humiliated to the ground.

"I felt like a cross between a wild boar and an angle worm. I wanted to tear her to pieces, and I wanted to grovel on the ground before her, and beg her to put on the coat again.

"After about a minute, I picked the coat up, and said humbly: 'I beg your pardon, Miss Gertrude, won't you please take it back? I didn't mean to be rude.' My voice sounded so meek that I didn't know myself, but she

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did not deign to notice me in the least. She just kept on sobbing.

"'Well,' I said, after waiting a minute, 'if you won't take it, I'll have to put it on you.'

"'Don't touch me!' she cried.

"But I seized her. She fought like a little tigress! Strong!—I never saw anything like it! —but of course she couldn't hold out against me.

"I wrapped her up by main force, and told her that I would tie her with saddle girths if she tried to take the coat off again. She glared unutterable rage and hatred at me with her great black eyes. Then she turned her head away, and wouldn't move or speak.

"The cold was growing more and more intense. It nipped, slapped, pinched, all at once. I had to keep charging up and down to keep from freezing.

"Without saying anything, she moved off the saddle blanket and tossed it towards me. I wrapped it round me, but it didn't seem to make me any warmer.

"'If I could find some wood I could make a fire,' I said, fingering the matches in my pocket.

"'The saddle trees are wood,' she said, without looking at me.

"I lost no time in putting her suggestion in operation. I piled up the saddles and put some old letters that I happened to have with me under them, and soon we had a sickly, smoky little blaze. She crept up to it. Her face was swollen from crying, her eyes were red—all the rest of her was blue with cold. No, she didn't look pretty—an angel couldn't have under those circumstances —but I pitied her (for the first time), poor, pampered child, doomed to die out there in that wicked night—for it was almost six o'clock, and there was no sign of the storm abating.

"The saddles smouldered along. They could not last much longer.

"At half-past six there was a sudden, almost alarming lull. The wind gave one wild shriek, and died down. The snow stopped falling, the clouds parted, and there, within twenty feet of us, I saw the belt of cotton-wood trees that bounded the creek.

"'We are saved!' I exclaimed.

"She turned her face towards the woods, started up and fell back again.

"'I can't walk!' she said in a frightened whisper. I carried her bodily into the woods, and propped her up by a tree. Then I broke off branches, and in a little while had a big fire blazing right in front of her. That fire was the most beautiful thing I ever saw in my life.

"'Major Hughes,' she said in a few minutes, her voice trembling, 'I think my feet have fallen off—will you look and see?—I can't bear to—and if they have, let me die!—I beg of you to let me die!' She was too much exhausted to cry any more. I laid her down and drew her feet from under her, and took off her boots; she had on regular, long-topped boots, something like a man's, only softer. Her stockings were black silk. Her feet felt like little sticks. They were as cold as ice, but they were not really frozen.

"'They are all right,' I said; 'I'll rub them for you.' So I did. I was horribly afraid they would break. In about fifteen minutes she said that they felt better, and I was just about to propose that we start towards the garrison, walking a mile or so at a time, and stopping and building a fire, when I heard afar off a faint baying. It came nearer and nearer. I jumped up, and in furious haste added great branches to our fire. She watched me a moment, a startled look in her eyes, her head bent, listening—she heard the baying, too—then she *knew*.

"'The wolves!' she said, in a ghastly, blood-curdling whisper.

"My threat had come true.

"She crouched down beside the fire, holding her ears and gasping from terror. That fire was our only hope. The lean, furious beasts pressed about us, howling, their wicked eyes glaring in the light, their cruel teeth gleaming. Fortunately there was plenty of wood at hand. I extended the fire until it almost surrounded us, just leaving a passage for myself to go through, and I kept the murderous, hungry fiends off with burning branches.

"At three o'clock in the morning we faintly heard a bugle-call, then far-off shouts and whistles. Searching parties had been sent out for us, and one of them, seeing our fire, was heading towards it. The wolves did not give up all hope of their supper until the soldiers fired into them. As for Miss Gertrude, I hadn't time to look at her from the moment my fight with the wolves began until, surrounded by our rescuers, I saw her fall fainting into her father's arms. Her hat was pushed back, my coat, that had completely covered her face and head, slipped from round her, and, by the full light of the fire, I saw, just above her left temple, a broad streak of white in her black hair."

Just as Major Hughes finished his story, there was a clicking, as of high heels, in the hall, and a patter, as of little, soft-shod feet—a voice said dotingly: "Oh, oo is oo mover's darling!"

"What!—baby talk *here?*" said Captain Rhodes, looking at Major Hughes in astonishment.

The *portière* was drawn back, and a handsome little boy, about three years old, ran in, followed by a charmingly pretty young woman. She was very small, her eyes were as black as coal, and just above the left temple there was a broad streak of white in her black hair.

Captain Rhodes stared at her wonderingly.

"Why—it's——" he said—then stopped abruptly.

"Yes, *it's*," said Major Hughes, laughing, "and isn't it a good thing for me that five years ago I hadn't a controlling voice in army regulations?"

ELIZABETH HERMAN.

Keep your eye open for the Christmas Number of "Pearson's Weekly," which will be published Next Tuesday, Nov. 18th. It is good.

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By GEO. C. WALLIS, Author of *"The Winning of Gunhild,"* etc.

CHAPTER XIII.

PASSION'S PLAYTHING.

FOR all my eagerness and energetic urging, some months elapsed before the raw levy of men that Listra's gold had gathered was ready to take the field against such sturdy foes as I knew those bandit hordes, ensconced in their rocky retreats, would prove, and during this time there was not a wealthy young blood, or a dissolute, tottering old noble, within that gay city, more wildly dissipated, more uproariously fond of wine, more careless of his coin, more sleepless through the balmy nights, than Macis the officer. Yet with prurient prudence, I took pains not to go too far, lest I should find ill-favour in the eyes of the Princess. In all else I outstripped every rival in my reckless revelry, and none were so welcome, none were greeted with such admiring homage as myself at deepest carouse, at wildest carnival, at most daring mischief plot, at most abandoned drunken brawl. To my shame I write this.

So free was I, indeed, with money that before long I had to make a secret journey to my treasure cave, to re-enrich myself with gold and jewels. All was as I had left it, unmolested, save that the sea, at highest tide, washed another step of the rough and rocky stairway outside.

On my return I stayed again at the little inn, astonishing that greasy, timid, tardy host still more than before by the liberal largess I bestowed upon him.

Soon afterwards I set out from Thinæ at the head of nearly a thousand men-at-arms, and, proceeding northward by swift marches, had the good fortune to surprise and utterly defeat a band of the robbers on one of their marauding sallies—a band at least 300 strong. This sent up the spirits of my followers at a bound, and, flushed with success, and imbued with confidence in themselves and in my leadership, they pressed forward with ungrudging speed, unflagging zeal.

From haunt to haunt, from lowland to upland, from stockades upon the plain to fortified ledges upon the hills, from battlemented ridges to almost inaccessible caves, we forced those brigands, step by step, cubit by cubit, league by league, until at last, surprised out of their usual caution, and dumfounded at our persistent following up of every slight advantage, they met and gave us battle in a narrow pass, fought their hardest, strove like very fiends in their furious despair, and in the end were forced to seek temporary safety in flight. But the victory was dearly bought, leaving me only five hundred sound warriors to complete my task.

Still I kept on, ably seconded in my efforts by that indefatigable couple of worthies, Valdo and Atris, and at length pinned the vagrants in their last retreat—a rocky defile near the top of a mountain-range, whose northern side sloped into the sea beyond. Their vantage point was the only place where a large body of men could cross the range, and as it was useless to attempt to starve them out, as they were supplied by the pirates, I determined to bring matters to an issue then and there, having now four hundred men to oppose to their grim, gaunt band of seventy, entrenched in their formidable stronghold.

So formidable it was, truly, that any leader less reckless would have hesitated before it. The narrow path wound up the hill between tall, precipitous cliffs, unscaleable by human cunning, wound round the edge of a towering column of rock that rose sheer in the middle of the gorge, and, a few paces further on, crossed a deep ravine that ran transverse to it, by means of a rude, wooden bridge.

On the column of rock, and on both sides of the bridge, the brigands took their final stand. They could easily have stayed our progress by destroying the frail structure that spanned the abyss, but only at the cost of making themselves prisoners, unable to pursue their forays, since a few men left by me would have served to prevent them recrossing the critical point.

Up the narrow pass, dim already with the darkening shades of eve, in strange contrast to the glowing light on the peaks above, I led my sturdy band, higher and higher, till we reached the column of rock I have mentioned. Here we met the first fragment of the enemy's small force, perched high on the stony cliff, and lost many men in circumventing and clearing them out, and that done, pressed on with fresh zeal, and streaming along the curving ledge, re-entered the gorge and came to where our fifty remaining foes took stand to guard the bridge on which their lives depended. From this high point, looking northward, I caught a glimpse of the cold, grey sea, unbroken by a sail, washing restlessly upon a rugged shore.

"If we leave here victorious," I said to Valdo in the momentary hesitation before the conflict, "our work will be done, and there will only be yonder implacable, invincible foe to deal with," and I pointed to the distant waters.

"That is true, Macis," said he, "therefore, let us rid ourselves of all the enemies that we can."

He was ever sternly practical, was Valdo, and even the shadow of the great calamity that threatened the low-lying districts, and perhaps the whole of Atlantis, failed to turn his mind from its present purpose. A worthy soldier, truly.

So I turned and gave the order to advance and seize the bridge—an order more easily given than carried out, for here the ravine narrowed so that scarcely four men could pass abreast, and men fighting as the bandits fought, in their last hold and for their very lives, would be able to dispute the passage while strength remained to them to draw bow or swing sword. At them, pell-mell, in one great dashing charge we went, crowding through the narrow neck regardless of the death-dealing shower of arrows and bullets that the archers and slingers poured into our compact mass with terrible effect.

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Twice, thrice, we charged thus, each time surging back with diminished numbers, not a few stumbling forward in their mad impetuosity into the gulf below. I soon saw that this would only decimate my force to no purpose, and that it were wiser to let my marksmen pick our foes off one by one, and having withdrawn ourselves behind the shelter of a jutting rock, we set to work thinning that desperate little band from our place of safety, and with such ease, that in rage and disgust they separated, hiding themselves by twos and threes, to let the storm of missiles pass them by.

Now I saw my chance, and taking my two officers and calling on the rest to follow, I dashed down the gorge and bounded on to the bridge before the astonished foe could intercept me. Then we turned back to back, and fought as I have seldom fought before or since. Sword clashed on sword with fiercest stroke, dagger on shield, and arrow on helm, and high above all, the ringing blows of the robber chief's great axe resounded mightily on every skull that came within his reach. Soon the foemen between us and our main body were all cut down, and pouring over the bridge, we pressed the last score of stubborn dogs down to the very water's edge. Then they turned their backs to the sea as we formed in a semicircle before them, and drawing ever in, we slew them one by one and two by two, though slowly and with great loss to ourselves. Nearer and nearer to the flowing waves we forced the few who still strove on, till only the giant chief remained, swinging his great axe in hissing curves before him, as he stood there defiant, his feet already washed by the curling water.

Bounded on to the bridge.

"How many dogs does it need to pull down the solitary bear?" he shouted tauntingly. "How many cowards to slay a brave man?"

"I know not," I cried in answer, stung to fury by the insult, "but this I know, that one brave man alone is needed to despatch a braggart!" and signing to my men to draw back and hold their hands, I sprang forward and met the boaster in single combat.

With a roar of delight at what he thought an easy prey, the giant whirled his axe in a swinging circle round his head, and brought it down—but only upon the unresponsive sand. Again he whirled it, having parried my stroke, and again, thanks to my nimbleness of foot, missed his aim. Again the great axe whirled, and as it came, measuring my distance and watching my time, I leapt upwards and forwards, striking at the hardwood shaft with all my strength, and so well that Sunderer's blade passed slantwise through it, and, smiting downward with unabated force, was buried in the bandit's head.

My men gave a mighty shout when they saw the deed, making the rocks re-echo with their cries of jubilation, for now the work was done, and a handsome reward awaited all who were left alive to receive it, the greater, too, because out of the thousand men who had started out with me on this perilous mission, only 150 remained to share the spoil. So desperate had been that last, stern struggle.

As it was then near sunset we stayed by the shore till morning, then re-ascended the mountain to the ravine, breaking down the bridge when we had passed over, and retraced our steps with light hearts to the city of Thinæ, to receive and endure the plaudits, and feastings, and irrepressible attentions of the populace. I made report of our triumph with all due formality before the Princess, and, to Dison's unmistakable chagrin, was nominated her chief soldier, and commanded to take up my abode in the palace. As I bent low to acknowledge the favour, I seized her dainty hand and pressed it to my lips with feverish impulse, holding it, perhaps, longer than was needful, but unresistingly, nevertheless; and as I turned away our eyes met for a moment in a swift glance—a fiery, passionate message of love on my part, a half-responsive look on hers that seemed to say, "Wait and hope."

Elated by such promise of success, I was stalking from the room, scarce heeding how I went or against whom I jostled, when someone roughly seized my shoulder and hurled me a dozen paces from my path, and a voice rang angrily in my ear as I reeled:

"Take heed, interloping wretch, how you tread on the toes of better men than yourself!"

In an instant "Sunderer" was out of its sheath, and flashing in the air. Nor had I far to seek the cause of the sudden interruption. 'Twas the Lord Dison himself, with drawn sword, coolly regarding me with quiet jealousy, who had spoken.

"An you account not for such villainous language," I said to him, "and that speedily, be on your guard."

"I render no account to such adventurers as you," he made reply lunging at me with the blade.

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"Then take your deserts!" I cried, forthwith engaging him, slashing, thrusting, crossing, and recrossing with feint and counter-feint, parry, and ward. Immediately the great chamber was in an uproar, the ladies screamed, and clung to their husbands or lovers, men crowded round us to watch the strife, and Atris and Valdo reached my side but just in time to strike down a couple of Dison's paid varlets, who were about to plunge their daggers in my back, thinking to escape unnoticed in the general confusion.

I was too busy to see this at the time, being fully occupied with the irate noble, who proved a good match for me at first, but lost his ground when he grew frantic at his inability to break through my defence; and I grew calmer as the duel went on, till at last, with "Sunderer's" razor edge, I shivered his blade in twain and bore him to the floor, holding the blue steel against his throat in case he strove to rise.

Then I spoke him, asking with a mocking smile if he would that I forgave the insult or no, telling him that, if no, the blade should sever his ill-natured neck as swiftly as the lightning splits a stricken tree.

"If the Princess wills it, I crave pardon," muttered my fallen enemy; "not otherwise." I turned to Listra, who now stood near, not in the least disconcerted at the struggle, and asked if it was her will that the disgraced noble should humble himself before me.

"Nay," she answered, "I would see no man humbled to save his life, but you have done enough without. As my servant, Macis, I command you to sheath that wondrous blade of yours, and let the Lord Dison go about his business. To which I will add that I dismiss him, as a beaten warrior, from my town and province," and with that the dictatorial beauty turned on her heel in supercilious disdain of her former favourite.

"When my mistress orders, I must obey—at least, at present," I said to Dison, taking care that none of the sting in my remarks should be unfelt, "and, therefore, you are free to leave with a sound skin. But cross not my path again, or a dozen fair ones' pitying words shall not save you. Begone!"

His face almost hideous with the concentrated malice and suppressed mortification showing in it, the swordless soldier strode hastily away amid the jeers of the company, nor did I see him again till after many years.

Now my lot fell in pleasant lines, and I became the most noted man in all the province; nay, the repute of my skill and good fortune and the fame of my matchless sword spread far beyond its borders, and Macis the officer, the gayest of the gay, the favourite of Listra, the iron-handed champion of her little army, was a household word in many of the wonder-loving districts round about. Yet not all at once, nor of my own open seeking, did I become the acknowledged lover of the Princess. It happened in this wise:

For some time after the discomfiture of Dison I held aloof from her ladyship. At this the Princess was piqued, and flouted me whenever we met in the banquet or the guest rooms, so that I held aloof still more. This game of sullen distancy we kept up, till, as I expected, my lady, who was so used to flattery and homage, grew tired of it, and strove in many ways, and with the many arts she knew so well, to lure me from my seeming apathy.

Once, in a brilliant assembly, where she moved resplendent in her beauty, like the Spirit of Love incarnate, she turned her lustrous eyes full on me as I chanced to approach where she sat, surrounded by a bevy of her ardent admirers, and greeted me thus:

"Am I not fair, Macis, that you deem not my company worthy of your lordly presence?"

The men gazed curiously at me, so pointedly favoured, and the women whispered to each other quietly. For the benefit of the latter I answered:

"Fair you are, indeed, Princess—as a bright gem 'mid sparkling jewels, *rare and beautiful as any.*"

Pouting, the spoiled and petted creature turned away, while I bit my lip in vexation, wishing now to recall the words so lightly spoken, wishing that it were possible to throw myself upon my knees before her then and there, for I could not hold out against her charms and wayward grace much longer. Reviling myself for my contrariness, I retired to my quarters and paced the room fretting and fuming in impotent chagrin.

By now my Princess had had enough of it, and sent a messenger to command the officer Macis to attend upon her in her audience chamber without delay. Thither, heavy-hearted, I proceeded forthwith, expecting nothing less than a contemptuous dismissal, and perchance a passionate outburst of invective from her ruby lips.

I found her alone, reclining on the self-same ivory couch where I first feasted my eyes on her bold, dark beauty, her raven hair this time flowing in loose rich tresses upon her cream-white shoulders; her rounded arms bare from the elbow, save for the circlets of solid gold that nestled on her wrists; her purple robe exchanged for one of a dark, shimmering silk, that fitted her lithe form to a marvellous perfection, showing every graceful curve with clearness, and contrasting well with the fair skin and white embroidered edgings of the neck and sleeves; and her dainty feet tapped the polished floor impatiently when I entered, revealing most coquettishly a pair of neatest ankles beneath the falling folds of silk. Upon her head gleamed a clustering coronal of purest diamonds, which sparkled dazzlingly in the lamp-light when she raised her eyes to mine on hearing the sound of my footfall.

"Then you deign to come at my command, my proud soldier?" said she, with a tinge of irony.

"Your word is law to me, Princess," I said, chilled by her reception, "as it is to all your servants."

"Now you speak as a servant should. Know you, then, that I am minded to send you away, as I sent the noble Dison, whom you so cruelly ill-used?"

"I feared as much," said I in answer, "and if so I have no choice but to suffer and obey, though as to ill-treating Dison, I will do the same again an he crosses my path."

"Still haughty and self-willed, I see," returned the Princess, "though you are more amenable to reason than you were an hour ago. Before I send you away I must have an explanation of your curtness, and wherefore you slighted me in presence of my guests and vassals. But pray sit down—you look so gainless standing there like a prisoner on trial!—here, at my side—there is room enough and to spare on this couch, an it be not too hard to suit your Majesty."

Wondering, I complied, nothing loath, though the ivory seat was scarcely large enough for the two of us, and our forms must needs touch. Her hand fell on mine, it seemed by chance, and burned upon my flesh as a thing of fire.

"Now tell me, Macis," said Listra, looking full into my face with her melting orbs, that took all the stubbornness and anger out of me, "now tell me, I pray, wherefore you spoke lightly of my beauty before all men?"

"'Tis hard to tell," I answered, returning her gaze with an ardent look that no daughter of Atlantis could misread, "but methinks it was because I thought you looked on me in no other light than as a servant, paid for his duty," and while I spoke the vision of Briseis came into my mind, and I remembered how I had once so talked with her.

"And in what light would you that I looked on you?" asked my lady.

"As an equal," I responded boldly, "equal both in rank and riches."

"Then why came you here to join my soldiers?"

"Because," said I, "I love an active life, and Vichri commended your province as one where I should have such a life as I desired."

"Is that all?" she asked, in a low voice.

"All," I answered, my tongue still refusing to say the words that were burning for utterance. For a little time the Princess sat regarding me with a curious expression,

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"Oh, Macis!" she cried.

part angry, part sad, part hungry—as only a woman in love can look—and then, without a word of warning, she slipped off the couch, and was clinging to my knees in passionate entreaty.

"Oh, Macis!" she cried beseechingly, seizing my hands convulsively in hers, while the crystal tears stood in her eyes, "Oh, Macis! if thou art human, and can read a woman's heart, and are moved by a woman's suffering, breathe one word of love to me! Nay!" (as I strove to raise her from the floor) "Nay! *I will not rise* until thou sayest thou dost think me the dearest of women! Deep down in thy heart thou must do, Macis, my beloved, for e'en an iceberg melts when floating into warmer waters, and I have loved thee, thou proud, strong soldier, since the day thou first wast brought to me, and spoke a flattering speech into my willing ear. Now, own that thou hast felt the same, and dared not say it—for so 'tis, my Macis, is it not?" and the soft, pleading voice rang almost stern in its last questioning.

Before that wild appeal from one so fair and young and so encharmed with my unworthy self, all sense of right and wrong, the image of Briseis, the warning of Isis, and all things I had once minded, were forgotten and went down into viewless chaos, and, marvelling how 'twas that I had held back so long, I bent down and seized my sweet, pleading Princess in my rough, scarred arms, lifting her from the floor to the couch beside me, myself now all aglow with passionate longing, and took unstinted measure of bliss from her responsive lips before I answered:

"It is as thou thought, my Listra, for I also have loved thee since our eyes first met."

"Then I am content, for of all men thou art the noblest and the best," she whispered, nestling to my arms, and giving back kiss for kiss and caress for caress.

Now it seemed to me as though the Gate of the Garden of Pleasure—that lies beyond the Shadowland—was opened before us, and we walked therein, alone with our sweet restrainless passion; that through the waking vision I saw the Spirit of Love smile softly on us, as a mother smiles upon a favoured child; and in that first fierce fever-flush of delirious delight, with those soft, warm arms about me, that velvety cheek pressed close to mine, the nectar of those willing lips upon my own, I ceased to care for aught on land or sea besides the radiant creature who thus caused my eyes to darken to all else besides her own supreme, enchanting loveliness.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Waking of the Sleeper.

Now all things went well with me for a space, intoxicated as I was with the love of Listra, and for nearly a year I lorded it over the province of Aidè, and strutted proudly about the streets of Thinæ, idolised of the soldiers, envied of the nobles—and hated of some, who sought my position—caring little for the news which reached us from time to time of the ceaseless rising of the sea and the inward flight of the frightened dwellers on the shore, heeding little the many rumours of disaster to our forces in Western Ulmeca, in conflict with the Red Barbarians, and still less heeding the stories of the Queen's indomitable zeal in organising her armies and fleets, and storing munitions of war.

All this passed indifferently to me, who was bound up in my Princess, and had no eyes or ears for other things for long together. Fresh bands of robbers appeared on the hills once or twice, but I sent my two trusty followers against these, not caring to leave my mistress for so long a time as would be needful to expel them; and Valdo and Atris, I make no doubt, were quite as willing to earn the glory and share the spoil unaided. Also I fought once with a blustering lord who made some jesting insult regarding myself and my Princess when in his cups, and though he was a notable swordsman, it availed him nothing against the sharpness of my magic blade; and to Listra's inexpressible delight I wounded him so grievously that he died before a week had passed.

All this I am telling to my shame, even though it savours of self-abasement in the telling to you who read; but in setting down the doings of my life it were ill to keep back the evil days, recording only the good, and portraying myself as that which I was not—and thus must I account for the fulness of my story. It has ever been a heavy task with me to dissemble, saving in the matter of my name, in which deceit I think I have excelled.

At last came word by mounted messengers that Quitzaal, the governor of Ulmeca, had risen in revolt with the aid of the Red Barbarians, and had put to the sword all who were faithful to the Queen, as Ethiop had done in Nubia years agone; that many of the soldiers under his command had acknowledged him as King of Ulmeca, and had seized a goodly number of warships in the harbours; that Vichri, who was with him, had proclaimed himself King of Atlantis, and with the help of Quitzaal was making preparation to invade his coveted country; and that the pirates, far and wide, had made common cause with the rebels, and were mustering their vessels from oversea.

Following hard on the heels of the bearers of these tidings came one with the Royal Seal, commanding the Princess, as governor of the province, to send an armed force as strong as she could spare, under a trusty captain, to the plain outside the city of Kronos, there to join the army that was gathering to repel the imminent invasion of the two rebel leaders. To this last message and command, the Princess paid no attention further than to bid the courier return and tell his sovereign that the province of Aidè was able to defend itself, and expected others to do the same, but that no soldier should cross her borders except in direst need.

This answer angered me somewhat, for I began to get ambitious, and to long for further glories on the field of war, but when I made attempt to reason with my wayward

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mistress, she at first said that she was not so sure, as her lord the Prince was in Ulmeca, that she ought not to lead her men against the Queen; and then she urged that if I went to battle I might never return, and what would she do then? And when I persisted, she gave way to a flood of petulant tears with which all my arguments were swept away, and I had to make pretence to come to her mind before she was appeased.

But others were not so blinded by her sophistries as I, and many, deeply offended, deserted in secret, and found their way to Court, bearing tales of their Princess's humour and spirit, and of her amour with myself. Valdo and Atris, in particular, were enraged at her decision, and but that I entreated them to remain in my service, would also have gone, and to console them somewhat I took to going hunting and fishing raids with them, bringing myself at last to leave my love on occasions.

I grew tired of for ever dangling in her wake, and, moreover, her temper was intensely passionate and jealous, so that I was in contant fear lest a stray smile from any lady should rouse her slumbering fire, and perhaps lead her to do the unoffending victim a mortal injury. Yet, when after a temporary quarrel we were reconciled again, it was like sunshine after storm, so bewitchingly lovable was she, so prettily attentive to my wants, so joyously merry all day long.

Another thing that came to my knowledge, and disquieted my mind considerably, was the fact that Queen Briseis had never issued a decree of special sternness against pirates, as Vichri had made me believe at that roadside inn; had never put a price upon my head, or so much as made mention of me since her accession to the throne. If so much was false, how knew I that what he said regarding his own share in my seizure and sentence fifteen years ago was true?

"Vichri shall tell the truth next time we meet!" I said to myself ominously.

One day, whilst fishing with baited lines from the shore where I had slain the bandit chief, my two followers alone being with me, I descried a white sail on the horizon line, at first no larger than a seamew's wing, but coming in swiftly towards the land under a strong north-west wind. Nearer and nearer it came, till I saw that it was a full-sized warship, well manned and worked, flying a strange flag—a red cross, outlined with white, upon a field of blue—and evidently steering for the creek just below the rock from whence we cast our lines. Seeing this, we drew them in and hastened down to the sand to await the stranger's coming, for I had seen enough by this time to know that it was no pirate we had here.

When within some hundred paces of the shore the strange sail hove to, and a boat shot out from her side, breasting the creaming surges of the inlet, and running her keel high up on the sand. A tall, soldierly man, still young, but well-set as one who had seen rough service, sprang out upon the beach, followed by a score of armed men, and, marching up to us, demanded authoritatively who we were and what was our business there?

My answer to this short, sharp summons was equally as sharp and short, for I was not used to being addressed so roughly by strangers.

"Who I am," I said curtly, "you had better inquire of someone else, and my business *is* my business."

"Think yourself of importance, doubtless," the tall man answered, with a queer smile, "but perhaps you may not be above knowing *my* name?"

"By no means," said I, "and, that forthcoming, may enlighten you as respects myself and these my followers."

"Good!" the stranger replied. "Know, then, that I am the Prince of this province of Aidè, and am come to take up my residence and duties here after a long absence; so that if you live within my jurisdiction I can demand your name, and your object in being on this deserted coast."

Momentarily I was taken aback at the sudden knowledge that I stood in the presence of my love's rightful lord, and Valdo and Atris stared open-mouthed and wide-eyed as the tall man uttered so startling a piece of news. Recovering my complacency, however, and reflecting that here was stern necessity for the exercise of that dissemblance which I so detested, I returned:

"As to our object, Prince, 'tis simple enough; one must have sport, and fishing, I believe, is called by that name amongst its votaries. As to myself, I am known at Thinæ as an officer of the palace guard, by name Valdo. Aught more I can tell thee?"

"Much," he answered shortly. "You can say whether my soldiers have gone to the war on behalf of the Queen, or no."

"I had not been here, in idleness," I replied, "if a chance had offered of active service, but the Princess forbade us to take part in the war, much to the chagrin of many. Some have deserted of their own will, but a good force remains."

"Then my Princess had that sound sense," mused my questioner thoughtfully. "And whilst talking canst tell me any news of my lady? Nay, out with it! no matter what it may be; I can partly guess its purport!"

"I can best tell you," I began, with every appearance of reluctancy, "by advising you to march on Thinæ fully armed and prepared to do battle with the holder of the keenest blade in the world. There is much talk in the city concerning the Princess and one Macis, her chief officer, and rumour has it that he is the Prince of Aidè in all but name."

To this the tall soldier made no response save a most expressive firm-setting of the lips, but went on to say:

"Would you care to do me a service? You shall not be unrewarded when I come into my own again."

"Ay, and glad of the chance," I cried, feigning enthusiasm at the prospect, "for 'tis tiring work to be at a woman's beck and call, and to sit fishing while others revel in the shock of arms."

"Then seemeth to me, Calasis," said the Prince, addressing one of his troop, "that here we have the very man we seek?" The other nodded. "Then," he went on, turning to me, "what I desire is a trusty man to hasten to Thinæ with the news that a large force of the enemy are landing near the southern confines of Aidè. That will draw off the fighting men from the city, so that I and my band can make entry and seize the palace and its false mistress before the alarm can spread. Then I will answer for my success. Canst do this?"

"Readily, and enjoy the trick," I answered. "I will start without delay."

"Go then and prosper," said the Prince. "Stay!" he added, "Calasis and a score of my men shall go with you as far as the wooden bridge, and remain to guard it till I have got my men over. Now hasten."

I smothered my anger at being thus baulked as well as I could—for I had meant to throw down the new bridge that I had erected—and together we rode up the hill side, crossed the wooden span, and there leaving the score of soldiers, struck spurs into our horses and clattered down the rocky ravine with re-echoing tread. As soon as we debouched upon the plain, I drew up, and consulted with my two followers.

"You heard what passed between me and the Prince?" I asked.

"All," said Atris solemnly.

"And see that 'tis folly for me to return to Thinæ?"

"Utter folly," said Atris, again solemnly.

"Then," I said, "this is what I will do. You two are free to go with me, or back to Thinæ to make the best of your chances, but I shall seek refuge in the southern districts of the country. Make your choice now, and let us say farewell."

"Not so fast, captain!" said Valdo, smiling, "let us make our choice before you say farewell! For my part, I go with you anywhere on land or overseas. I have had enough of courtier life."

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"And so say I," assented Atris, "for our captain will need us to guard his back as we have done before an he goes far alone in this disturbed country."

"Your faithfulness shall not be unremembered," I said, deeply moved, "for I think I can show you a hoard of treasure that will make your mouths water, and we will be sharers of it. Now will you go or not?"

"We go," they reiterated.

"Then away!" I cried; and the three of us let out at full gallop along the silent road, directing our course to the westward of Thinæ, and towards the village where I had first entered the province. Our horses were still fresh, the night was warm, and the stars shone brightly, so we raced on till the rosy dawn illumined the hill-tops, and the world of life awoke to another day of activeness. Then we rested at a wayside house, then on again, and thus, avoiding the larger towns and ever keeping forward, we reached the outskirts of the hamlet where I had engaged my two attendants, and, passing round it, crossed the border-line into the next province.

Well do I remember my last glimpse of Aidè. We were riding gently down a winding valley, hemmed in by a chain of undulating eminences, letting our steeds have their bridles, and proceeding silently, each engrossed with his own thoughts. To our right the wooded ridge, rich with its age-old trees and rife with timorous game, rose grandly above us, the great red blossoms of the autcylus flaming across its darkest places, intersprinkled with the whitish hemlock; to the left a hidden brook made sweet melody adown the lovely slope as it hurried to the river; behind, rose green hills melting away into the cloudy sky; in front, the vale curved sharply, so that we appeared to be riding at a great dead wall. The day was drowsily hot, every leaf and pebble gleaming with that surface sheen that pleases so well the man in strong and healthy vigour and so dejects the sorrowing, solitary traveller, out of tune with man and nature too.

Taking a last look at the lovely prospect we rounded the jutting rock at the foot of the valley, and were then riding in the province of Yand.

We kept on, staying a night to rest at the inn of mine host with the fat form and greasy face, being none too sparing in our remarks anent his tardiness, and then struck out for the wind-swept plateau where the entrance to my cave was hidden.

Dismounting at the edge of this thick-grown plain, hearing even then the splash of the waves on its seaward face, we made our way to the tunnel mouth, and one by one struggled into the cavern. Here an exclamation of surprise and delight burst from both my comrades. The vast wealth dazzled their eyes, and roused the avarice that is in every human soul—even though it be dormant.

"Now," said Atris, speaking a longer sentence than was his wont, "we shall be rich as princes, and well paid for leaving her ladyship."

"Now," said Valdo, ever practical, "we shall be able to pay a troop of men large enough to take to the war under a separate flag."

"Which is my intention," I remarked; "but first we must get this gold into convenient shape for carriage. 'Twere idle to try to take away these great bars as they are, and I have spent most of the coins and jewels already."

Having made provision for a short stay, we set to work breaking up the heavy ingots of the costly yellow metal into sizes suitable for transport, and then, taking as many as we could carry, loaded our horses and ourselves with it and with the few remaining gems and money pieces, still leaving behind some dozen unbroken bars of gold and several great reels of rich, thick-woven cloth, worth a king's ransom. One thing I noticed was that the sea, at highest flow, was just awash with the cave floor.

Thus, loaded down with wealth, off we went again, shaping our way for Kronos, and for all the pelf I had about me, and for all the lively songs and well-meant quips and jokes of my two companions, I was for the most time sunk in moody reverie. It is true that the pangs of parting from Listra were not so very keen—were rather a relief from irksome dalliance, indeed; but the thought of seeing Briseis again and the danger of being recognised—if it was a danger any more—was material in plenty for worrying uneasiness. The future loomed up black even as the past did, saving only that short and blessed time, like the far-off gleam of a brilliant star, when I lived in the house of Briseis as her favoured guest, and dark treachery had not thrown its withering blight upon my chequered path.

At length, having travelled many weeks, and being tolerably ignorant of passing events, we found ourselves within an hour's ride of the town of Miropis, which I had such good cause to recollect, the pointed cone of the Sacred Grotto jutting up out of the plain directly before us. At sight of it a thought flashed into my mind.

"An you would like to see the Sacred Sleeper," I said to my comrades, "now is our time. We can tether our horses in the cactus groves in perfect safety."

"Lead on, then, Captain," cried Atris, his curiosity aroused, and Valdo agreed.

So we went forward towards the conical, hollow hill, penetrating the belt of forest that surround it, and threading reverently through the dildo maze, in which we secured our animals, until we reached the entrance.

"Now follow me," I said, "and do not speak until I give the word." Therewith, bending low, I scrambled through the orifice in the black rock, closely succeeded by the two soldiers, and we stood upright within the vasty hall, gazing, awestricken, at the immensity of void that lay around us. Valdo and his comrade were too overcome by the sight to say much; but their faces, dim as was the light, showed me that they felt much as I had done on my former visit. The thin, bright ray that pierced the murky middle of the two-coned vault still glowed on its straight down-pouring course into the gulf below. As we gazed, the rope rattled loosely at my side, and the door which closed the entrance fell, leaving us in darkness save for the solitary ray of light, and I had but time to whisper to my friends "stir not for your lives!" when a voice rang out, though modulated as by coming from a distance, the words that I recalled so well.

"Enter, and fear not, O, Arnon, for the place where the Sleeper sleeps is holy ground!"

I answered that I would enter when I saw a safe way. The voice replied, as of old:

"Take three paces to the right, you and your comrades, and all shall be plain before your feet."

We followed this instruction, and then, as I expected, the thousand lights around the rocky vault flashed forth into a flood of brilliancy, showing us the steps that led from our little stone platform in a curving path to the earthward apex of the inverted pyramid. Down this winding stair we crept, I leading, the others still dumfoundered, until we reached the lowest point and stood beside the couch of gold on which the Sleeper lay, the brazen shield still resting on him and reflecting the great sun-ray from its polished surface. As before, the two watchers, who seemed as little changed by the hand of Time as the sleeping body they guarded, spoke, one saying softly, "Wait!" and the other, pointing upwards, "Look!"

Then, amid the silence, the hundred doors on the stairway opened, and the hundred Priests of Truth came marching down the steps, formed in a double ring round us and round the Sacred Sleeper, singing the self-same chant whose notes had haunted me ever since I first heard it. Into a mighty volume of soaring sound it rose, majestically echoing round the lamp-lit vault, then falling in wild weird melody from the sloping slides and meeting in a focus overhead; nor this time, any more than of old, did the sleeping figure make slightest sign of life!

Now I waited to see the white-robed company reascend to their hundred cells as before, but they moved not,

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standing as they stood to sing, mute, still, and dreadfully unnerving with their stolid stare. Then Unim, the elder of the watchers, turning, spoke:

"It is both well and ill for thee, my son, that thou hast sought this holy spot. But first tell me, thou who went from here with curses on thy lips and hast doubted my word full oft since then, have not my prophesyings proved true?"

"Even so," I answered, "though I doubted long."

"Then thou hast learned, and see thou forgettest not the lesson, that what the Spirit of Truth utters by the mouth of Unim can never fail. This, then, I further say to thee, though it is forbidden for me to lift the veil too far, lest mortal eyes should shrivel up at the awful prospect. Thou hast come for counsel, as I foretold, and my counsel is to seek the presence of the Queen as soon as may be, and so be restored to thy former favour, for the treachery thou chargest her with was not of her doing, but another's. Then thou shalt become great in Atlantis, greater than all men, though not without strife and coming near to death full often in the service of thy country. Nay, even these with thee have no common lot, and each shall find a warrior's grave, their names being known as long as Atlantis lasts. As to thyself, O, Arnon, son of Didron, whom men know now as Macis, it is told of thee that, after many dangers, thou shalt die in the arms of the sea that thou lovest so well, though many shall have gone that way before thee.

"And more than this it is not good for thee to know, save that the land is doomed and its glory fast departing. So hath the Spirit of Truth moved me to speak."

"Something I would tell thee, Unim," I said, "and ask thy answer to it. When I dwelt in that foreign land as a priest I had a vision from one of their gods, the Spirit of Isis, and I would know whether it was a true one or not."

"First tell me the vision," said the priest.

So I repeated the substance of it and the prophesy of the shadowy shape regarding my re-union with Briseis and the great temptation I was warned against, my hundred and three listeners hearing me in perfect silence to the end.

"It was a true foretelling," said Unim, when I had finished my story, "and showeth that the Spirit of Truth is worshipped in other lands than here, though it be under another name and with other rites. It shall come to pass as the Shape said, but I fear me, Arnon, my son, that thou hast already fallen before the temptation there foreshadowed. Art not now travelling from the province where a lawful bride of a distant lord bewails thy absence?

"But what is done, is done, my son, and as only the spirits know the heaviness of our trial, so they only can condemn, and in condemning, temper the punishment to the doer's guilt; so they only can be truly merciful. Let that pass, and meet what the future may hold for thee with an undaunted heart, for till thou hast been here a third time, *fear not death.*"

He ceased, and the younger of the watchers turned to me, saying in a softer voice than Unim's:

"Look upon the Sleeper, Arnon, and call him from his slumber; for haply he may hear thee, who art so favoured of the gods in other ways."

I stooped and looked intently at the features of the sleeping warrior, for such I took it that he had been, by his shield and spear and martial dress, though the weapons were strange-shaped, sadly ancient then, and all of bronze instead of iron. His face, I saw, now that I observed it closely, was that of a man of middle-age, his form was well-knit but rather large-boned, he was no taller than myself, and seemed to all appearance as a healthy man who had fallen quietly asleep and was sleeping undisturbed.

"O, Sleeper!" I cried, obeying the priest's injunction, "awake, arise, and live! I, Arnon, the son of Didron, call upon you."

The recumbent figure moved not so much as a finger. I called again, and still no visible response.

"You must take his right hand in yours, and command him in the name of the Spirit of Life," said the priest. I did so, taking the right hand in mine, and saying:

"Sleeper of the Grotto, awake, arise, and live! I, Arnon, the son of Didron, call upon you in the name of the Eternal Spirit of Life, for the hour has come for your eyes to be unsealed!"

A quiver ran down the sinewy frame that had been so long without a stir, a deep-drawn breath escaped the parting lips, the eyes unclosed, lighting with the light of reason, and he who had last seen the sun a thousand years agone sat up, gazing wonderingly, confusedly, first at the ray that poured down the awesome place, and then at us who stood around in silent surprise, in bewilderment no smaller than his own.

"Methought I heard a voice calling."

"Methought I heard a voice calling," said the wakened man; "a strange voice, speaking of the hour that has come. Where is Mattoni, and where Olasin, and where am I?"

"In the Grotto sacred to the Spirit of Truth," Unim answered composedly, as though he conversed with a well-known friend, "in which thou hast slept a thousand years, because the gods so willed it."

"Merciful Spirits!" exclaimed the risen one, evidently but half believing the monstrous tale; "tell me, then, who reigns in Atlantis now?"

"The Queen Briseis," replied Unim.

"And who before her?" asked the Sleeper.

"King Dulo the Tenth," said I.

"Then I am near accepting this awful story," said the questioner, with the air of one who yet has doubts; "but take me into the daylight that I may be sure the land is Atlantis, and that things are not as they were."

"Willingly, if thou canst walk," said Unim.

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"Walk! ay, and run too," cried the other, "as though I but woke from a night's slumber, and was waiting for Mattoni and Olasin to go with me down to the sea to set sail in our argosy for the Isle of Olives."

"Then follow me," said Unim, as, preceded by the hundred white-robed priests, he led the way up the spiral stair, the clatter of our feet vibrating strangely in the hollow space. One by one the priests stepped back into their cells as we wound higher and higher, till only Unim and the Sleeper, with myself and two comrades, stood upon the platform before the entrance, which, being opened by the watcher who remained below, by means of the trailing rope, gave us passage into the open air. And how fresh and free it seemed to us after the gruesome spell of that cavernous grotto!

In coming out the Sleeper turned and recognised the conical hill. "It, at least," he said, "is unchanged outwardly."

Nearly to its summit we now climbed, by a stair so cunningly contrived that it was invisible to the casual eye, and stood near the apex, looking out upon the picture of land and sea and sky spread before us in the full glow of the even's sun. There was the plain over which we had ridden, there were the vast cane brakes, intersected by their narrow irrigation canals, there was the hated town of Miropis, and beyond was the dark blue sea, its tide now ebbing from the shore. Marenso (as the Sleeper was named) gazed silently upon the scene for a while, his face wearing an inscrutable expression; then sighed, and spoke:

"It is enough," he said; "you tell me true indeed. It must indeed be a thousand years since I stood upon this pyramid, and, gazing out to where is now the ocean, saw waving fields of corn, with hamlets here and there, stretching right to the sky. This town was not so large as 'tis now, nor was the sea nearer than a day's journey. Also this grotto was but half cut out when I remember it, and the people that I knew wore different dress to yours. It is enough. Now leave me, I pray, to silence and solitude, that I may grow used to the awful knowledge. Leave me, I say, in silence and solitude, here or otherwhere."

"In the Grotto alone thou wilt find peace," said Unim, and led him therein, returning to us shortly.

"Priest of Truth," I asked him, pointing to the town, "canst tell me why yon fleet of warships is gathered in the bay, why the town is all astir with soldiery and fenced about with barricades, and why these fields around are filled with a beleaguering force?"

"That can I easily," answered Unim. "Miropis has been seized by a sudden raid of the invaders, the Governor of the garrison, Sothi, having treacherously surrendered and gone over to the enemy, and now holding the place for them. The vessels yonder, four score in number, are their ships, and the besieging force is a detachment of the Queen's army under one Nayrahn, a brave soldier, but over slow in his doings. It would be well if you were to go down and hasten his movements; fearing not to be known by your rightful name."

I needed no further news, already smelling the battle from afar, longing to mingle in it, and so to drown the sadness that was fast benumbing my intelligence.

"To horse!" I cried to my dazed followers, suiting the action to the word, leaping down the cone, and springing into my saddle in hot haste. "We will burn this hated town above the heads of its inhabitants, and hang its traitor-governor on the deck of his allies' flag-ship. When last I looked on this wine-sodden hole I swore by the Eternal Spirits to re-enter it only as a conqueror, and that I will."

"Remember the words of Unim!" said the grave old man whom we left standing near the black pyramid's apex, "and enter not the Grotto again until you bring the body of the Sleeper here, dead. In life you shall next see him at the Court of the Queen."

Impatient of delay, scarce heeding his words, and even ceasing to wonder at the waking of Marenso from his age-long slumber, in my revengeful fury I dashed down the groves at sacrilegious pace, Valdo and Atris coming hard behind, and on we tore from the forest belt, across the waving fields, recklessly trampling down the grain and the bright, brittle stalks of cane, leaping waterways, flying over thick bushy hedges, charging unceremoniously through the lines of sentries round the Queen's men, riding uninvited past the camping troops of soldiers and the serried ranks of the mounted guard, and slacking not our pace for all the cries of the surprised sentinels till we reached the General's tent, where, bidding my comrades remain on guard, I dismounted, lifted the door-flap, and stalked in with unblushing effrontery.

(To be continued.)

RESULT OF JUMBLED STORY. No. 17.

First prize of £5: Mrs. Harris, 4, South Road, West Kirby, Cheshire; £1 each to Mr. Thos. Woolner, 63, Beaufort Road, St. Ann's Road, Green Lanes, N.; Mrs. Peirse, Northover Cottage, Charlton, Shepton Mallet; Mrs. Jane Hudson, 8, Bettridge Road, Hurlingham, S.W.; Miss Jessie F. Dulley, Lindens, Wellingborough; Mr. M. F. Musson, 21, Sutherland Avenue, W.

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11	59	80	51	9	62	60	86	35
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A MUTUAL SURPRISE.

"AND is that really all?"

"All?"—and Mrs. Jardyne's big brown eyes glanced up at her visitor with an expression of pathetic reproach.

"Yes, all," continued Captain Mathurin, drawing a chair near his hostess. "Your note led me to expect all sorts of awkward complications. Why, the thing is as simple as can be."

Mrs. Jardyne shook her head dolefully.

"I cannot see that. Oh, if you knew what a dreadful night I have passed!"

"Poor little girl! But where does the difficulty come in?"

"Why, I have told you. I dare not advertise for them, because I should have to say how and when I lost them, and Gerald gave them to me when we were married, and I nearly always wear them."

"Well, but there are other pearls in the world, I suppose?"

Mrs. Jardyne looked up quickly.

"The only thing to do," continued the Captain smoothly, "is to match them as nearly as possible; and, unless Jardyne knows a good deal more about such things than I do, he'll be none the wiser."

"But he would know eventually."

"Why?"

Mrs. Jardyne grew pink, and as her complexion was of the delicate, transparent sort, the pause before she answered was very agreeable to Captain Mathurin's sense of the beautiful.

"Why?" he repeated, after a second.

"Because"—and Mrs. Jardyne's small, jewelled hands twisted nervously—"because Gerald pays all my bills."

The confession was a humiliating one, and Captain Mathurin would have hated himself for forcing it, if his companion had not looked so absolutely bewitching upon the moral rack.

"But this matter of the pearls does not concern you at all, Mrs. Jardyne. You were in my charge. It was through some carelessness of mine that the necklace was lost; therefore, in common fairness, it is my business to replace it—don't you see?"

"Oh!" But the first exclamation of relief was quickly followed by a very mournful shake of the head. "Oh, no! I could not possibly allow you, Captain Mathurin."

"Nonsense! Why not?"

"Oh, because—because I could not; it would be so dreadful."

"More dreadful than to tell your husband how you lost the pearls?"

"Oh, I shall never dare do that. I know Gerald would never forgive me. Oh, how wrong—how mad it was to go!"

"Come, Mrs. Jardyne, don't be so terrified about it. When all is said and done, there is nothing so very dreadful in going to the Empire with one of your husband's friends."

Gladys Jardyne was a very fragile-looking creature, with soft, fluffy, yellow hair, and an innocent childlike expression, which irritated her own and charmed the other sex; but for all her irresponsible expression and infantile ways, she was a passibly shrewd little person, and had a very distinct idea that to go to the Empire with Captain Mathurin while Gerald was away was distinctly one of those things she ought not to have done, and that to accept this suggested present of a pearl necklace was by no means the simple, irreproachable transaction her companion wished to imply—but—but——

"Don't look so wretched! I shall never forgive myself for having made you sad. Let me run straight off to Ryder, and see what I can do."

Captain Mathurin saw that the golden curls shook with less decision than before.

"But——"

"You will see that I have excellent taste. I may go, may I not?"

"I know it is very wrong," faltered Mrs Jardyne; "but it would be so dreadful to explain: and you—you are very kind!"

Captain Mathurin would have liked to express his feelings in somewhat warmer fashion than by pressing the little fingers; but he had served his apprenticeship in Cupid's Court, and knew that a precipitate move is often ruinous to the brightest prospects.

"When do you expect Jardyne back?" asked the Captain as he rose to go.

"He is coming by the Club train. I suppose he will be here almost directly."

"You will not be expected to wear the pearls to-night?"

"No, but I shall on the 20th at Lady Vipere's."

"And to-day is only the 18th. You need not be anxious. You shall have them to-morrow."

"Oh, how can I ever thank you, dear Captain Mathurin!"

"Nonsense! If you will sometimes remember our evening at the Empire—and me—I shan't want any more thanks."

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"I shall never forget either," said the little woman fervently. "The 17th of June will always be a red letter day to me!"

"And to me!" echoed Captain Mathurin, with such significance that, even after the hall door had closed upon him, Mrs. Jardyne felt herself blushing from crown to chin.

"He is very nice," she murmured, as she turned away from the window, "and there is really no harm in it; and—oh! I do hope he'll get a pretty clasp; the other was such a perfect thing!"

* * * * *

Mr. Jardyne was in great spirits on his return from Paris! The "legal business connected with the estate of a maternal uncle," as he explained to his not too-curious better half, had been arranged in a most satisfactory manner. It was delightful to be home again, and, by Jove! his little Gladys was the prettiest woman in Europe, etc., etc., all of which should have been gall and wormwood to Mrs. Jardyne had her conscience been of the stiff, unyielding sort; as it was, however, the golden-haired little lady allowed herself to be petted and made much of without any very serious moral qualms.

A sin is only a sin when found out, and if the little escapade with Captain Mathurin might, by the hypercritical, be ranged as one, nobody knew or would know anything about it, and what did it matter?

It must be confessed that Gladys was agitated by no stern self-communings as she sat dreaming in her room half hidden in a capacious wicker-chair, on the evening of Lady Vipere's dance. On the contrary, the gown she was to wear was a dream—and what more could woman covet? Besides which, this fortunate little mortal reflected that Gerald was really quite delightfully attentive, and Captain Mathurin was certainly most—interesting! And, then, last, but not least, there was the blissful consciousness that over there, in her jewel-case, nestling in a violet velvet *écrin*, bearing her monogram and the date of her marriage, was a beautiful string of pearls, their exquisite gleaming purity set off by a shimmering, myriad-lighted clasp, which Gladys knew in her secret soul to be far more valuable than its predecessor.

She heaved a sigh of profound content as she turned to ring for her maid, but at that very moment the door opened softly, and, to her unbounded surprise, Gerald entered!

Her exclamation of surprise died on her lips as she saw him advance quickly and silently to the Japanese cabinet on which stood her jewel-case.

What was he going to do? It was evident that he had not seen her!

Vague uneasiness changed quickly to a very definite horror as she saw him turn the key of the leather case. Could he know anything of the pearls? Did he suspect?

She watched him eagerly; he was evidently looking for something. Yes, it was the necklet! He had the velvet case in his hands; he was going to the window with it!

A hundred terrible possibilities rushed through her brain—wild recollections of eagerly read reports of "criminal proceedings." Her conscience revenged itself in a few seconds for its long torpor. Everything was against her—the Empire, the *tête-à-tête* supper, the frantic letter she had written, the pearls! In agony of terror she started to her feet as Jardyne pressed the spring of the case.

"Gerald!"

Case and pearls fell to the ground with a crash as he turned on her a face as white as her own.

"What are you doing?" she stammered.

"I—Great Heavens! Gladys, don't look like that! What's the matter?"

"Nothing. You frightened me!"

"Poor little girl! Sit down. You are not going to faint, are you?"

"No. I am better, only——"

"That's right. Shall I ring for Celeste, or can I get you anything?"

"No; only what were you doing, Gerald——"

"You really must have some wine, darling!" broke in Gerald quickly. But, as Mrs. Jardyne's agitation subsided, she noted with surprise that her husband's agitation seemed to increase; his manner was nervously fidgety, and altogether more suggestive of the sinning than the sinned against. What could it mean?

She interrupted his flow of words with a question:

"I am quite well now. Tell me what you wanted with my pearls?"

Jardyne gave a nervous laugh: "Your pearls, dearest?"

"Yes; what are you going to do with them?" reiterated Mrs Jardyne, her tone becoming proportionately authoritative as Gerald's expression grew mendacious and shifty. "Why did you steal into my room in that way?"

The big man looked supremely unhappy. Gladys' soft brown eyes were fixed upon him with anything but a childlike expression as he began some blundering, hopelessly lame explanation, but he broke off suddenly:

"It's no use, Gladys: I'd better tell you the truth. The fact is, I did want to look at your pearls; I wanted to see if anyone could tell the difference."

"The difference!" gasped Gladys.

"Yes, you'll understand directly; but it's awfully hard to tell you, Gladys. You don't know, but I lost a pot of money over the St. Crispin, and, after my promise to you about the Oaks, I did not dare to tell you, and so—so—dash it, Gladys, you might help a fellow out!"

But Gladys sat motionless.

"So—so," pursued her husband desperately, "I took your pearls and sold them, and got a string at Faulkner's to put in their place until I was in funds again and could buy you some more, and—Good Heavens, Gladys! what's the matter?"

For Mrs. Jardyne had burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter—the situation was too absurd.

"It's awfully good of you to take it like this, Gladys!" resumed Gerald when his wife's hilarity had subsided, and she had expressed her gracious pardon for his heinous offence; "but you can't think how miserable I've felt when I've seen you wearing that gimcrack thing. However, I'm in funds now, and I'll get you a necklet ten times finer than the old one; while, as for this," he added contemptuously jerking the lovely string of pearls, "it may go to the——"

"Let me look at it," interrupted Gladys; "it is really very pretty," she continued with demure condescension, "and no one would ever tell the difference. I—I almost think I'll keep this, Gerald, and you shall give me something else as a peace-offering and a pledge of good behaviour!"

"Anything!" exclaimed Gerald, with rash enthusiasm.

"I saw a lovely set of emeralds at Hancock's; I have always coveted emeralds."

"You shall have them, my darling; you shall have them to-night! I'll rush round to Bond Street at once. You are the sweetest and most forgiving little angel on earth," he murmured ecstatically as he kissed his wife's pretty, childlike face!

WILLARD HOLCOMBE.

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JUMBLED STORY No. 20.] [SEE PAGE 640.

NETTIE LITHILL GOT HER PIANO.

The clock on my bedroom mantel struck four. London, that foggy, miserable, November day, as I seemed to grow lighter.

I struck a match, but I did not light my cigar.

For I was extravagant in those days, and said to myself, as I drew out a cigar, and turned to the little figure that stood at my side.

"Will he be blind, doctor?"

"Yes, he will be blind. We can do nothing."

Then this incident happened.

I heard a girl's voice, which sounded far away from Grosvenor Square. Among other things it thanked me very graciously for my services, and seemed to fall to pieces, and rolled over on the daughter, Sylvia, beautiful Sylvia, as cold and earnest, of my adventure of the morning.

A sob came from the girl.

She was dressed all in heliotrope, this quaint colour in my mind's eye.

A little thing in heliotrope—how well I knew the street. Heliotrope! How clearly I can picture the horses.

Next a cool hand was laid on my forehead.

I put up my arms and drew down a tear-stained Victoria Street, and waited for a cab.

"Let *me* marry you," said a silver voice. "You are not going to walk there? It's a long way."

A man's voice answered:

"Oh, no. I shall take a 'bus. But I have never saw her safely to her office.

She was annoyed, there could be no question for all that we did not love each other.

Then came the end; terrific, sickening. For a heartless as marble. It had all been arranged for the wheels creaked.

"It is so confoundedly early," I muttered to remember how you helped me in the fog? It is my voice, "which is the way to the Bank?"

I told them over the tea, half in fun and half in face and tried to kiss it. Then I dropped back on the pillows and fell asleep.

Nevertheless, the following morning, at half-past eight in the morning.

I laughed at the words, and lit another match, The subdued noise of the afternoon traffic below Fleet Street they shied at a boy who happened to reached my ears.

When I awoke I felt quite strong and well, except in Grosvenor Square. I was engaged to her proudly that I had no option but to consent.

* * * * *

That afternoon I called on my aunt, Lady Clarke, and looked anxiously up the street for a 'bus.

I forgot that I intended to go to Victoria.

"You naughty boy," said my aunt. "Aren't you about that. So I did not say anything more.

"All I can say," said Sylvia coldly, "is that if whispered into her ear, I put her in it, and followed ashamed of yourself?"

For several days after that I was at my post, and stood on the pavement outside my rooms in the girl's arm, "through fear of the traffic," as I flourish a morning paper. One horse swung round us long ago, and we were resigned to our fate. But you prefer the company of that sort of girl to mine, and was yet familiar, say in a whisper:

"Can you tell me, sir," said a little, quavering little girl, that sat back in her corner, and looked up to me and laid a hand on my arm. The match loomed out from the fog. I hailed it, and taking on to the pavement, the 'bus knocked against a door to light a match.

In those days I was not often out by half-past eight, I found myself in the street. The sun was unconscious.

At that moment an omnibus, dark and indistinct, threw out a circle of light, and fell on a mass of heliotrope tripped down the road opposite my door, swaying from side to side; the windows rattled; and bolted. The 'bus came lumbering after them, shining very brightly, as a certain little figure in golden, wavy hair and an upturned, anxious face.

Something struck me over the eyes; the iron-shod lamp-post, crashing in a window. The driver lost hoof of a horse, possibly and I fell back on the forehead.

"The way to the Bank?" I repeated, "surely you are blind, it is quite impossible for us to marry."

The conductor stood before us, and asked for the her penny before I could find a coin.

"You must let me pay my fare." She said it so got down at the Bank, and I showed her the way to the office where she had found an employment. She went in, trembling and nervous.

I felt glad enough that I was going away from myself: "Life is a jolly thing if you think of no one for a dull pain behind my eyes. I inquired if there had been harnessed to the 'bus. The driver had all his nerve, and chaos loomed ahead.

Two new horses, great, fiery, untrained brutes, ground, a medley of glass and wheels and struggling rustle of the dress—came forward, and kissed me contained this passage: "Of course, now that you drink and are merry."

For out of the fog came a little figure, that tripped but yourself, and spend enough money and eat, and held it above my head, and looked down on the turn now."

Well, we came to the end of our journey. We must have someone to look after you. You been there before, and I don't know where I am, you had better continue it."

Mad with fright, they took the bits in their teeth, out with her big, frightened eyes into the black fares. I fumbled in my pocket, but she held out he could do to keep them in hand. At the top of moment we remained motionless; then the 'bus were any letters. There was one, as I expected, her.

And the black darkness that surrounded me and—and, I am so afraid of this darkness."

I know better now.

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BY GEORGE MANVILLE FENN.

CHAPTER XLIII.

DRIVEN TO EXTREMITIES.

As Olive knelt, pressing her hair back from her brows, the front door closed with a heavy echoing sound, and a quick step told that Braetoun had passed the window.

She staggered slightly, and caught at the back of one of the chairs, as she stood up, holding her left hand to her throbbing heart.

For a few minutes she felt helpless and bewildered, her brain reeled, and she closed her eyes, but the giddiness passed off, and with teeth set she stood thinking of the scene that had passed.

A shudder ran through her, and a weary painful sigh tore its way from her breast, as, forgetful for the moment of Braetoun's threats, her mind was filled with her own, and giving one long look round at the room to which so short a time back she had returned from her honeymoon, a low tremulous cry escaped her lips.

But the weakness passed away, and she was firm. There was the old look of her father once more dawning in her face, and, gazing straight before her, she walked slowly to the door, passed out and upstairs to her bedroom, where she winced on finding her maid busy there.

The girl looked at her curiously, but Olive's face was inscrutable.

"My bonnet and mantle," she said.

"Which will your ladyship wear?"

"Any—the plainest."

The girl glanced at her as she went to a wardrobe, and then turned quickly round with the tears in her eyes.

"Oh, my lady," she cried quickly, "don't think me impertinent, but I can't help seeing and knowing. It hurts me when you are in such trouble."

The stern, hard look passed from Olive's face, and her eyes beamed upon the speaker, her lips quivering a little the while.

"Thank you, Melson," she said softly. "You have always been very, very kind to me."

"Oh, my lady, my lady," cried the girl, beginning to sob, "who wouldn't be kind to you?"

"Hush, pray!" said Olive, in a low, pained voice. "Don't speak to me, please. I cannot bear it. My bonnet and mantle, quick!"

The girl obeyed, and helped, gazing at her the while.

"My gloves," said Olive quietly, and as the girl turned her back she hurriedly took her watch and little chain from her waist, and then as the girl returned pressed both into her hands.

"As a keepsake, Melson," she said, with a piteous smile. "Thank you very much for what you have done for me. Good-bye!"

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"Oh, my lady! What is it? You are not—surely you are not——"

"Don't speak to me, Melson. Yes: I am going home."

She passed out of the room, leaving the girl sobbing violently.

Olive went slowly down the stairs, putting on her gloves as she went, her eyes lowered, and her face calm and stern, but as she reached the hall a change came over her and her eyes dilated with horror, for with crushing violence, as if out of some black cloud, the thoughts which had been dulled by her mental agony came back, and she seemed to hear again her husband's words.

In an instant the import of his threat came upon her in its fullest force, and, horrified now, she hurried out into the Square.

The giddy feeling came back and she shivered at the idea of being too late, and asked herself why it was that she had not followed at once.

Excuse—palliation—everything was swept away now, and she told herself that she had been guilty of criminal indifference and would be doubly blameworthy if anything had happened through her.

Home and flight to her father passed from her mind as the horror increased, and the desire to try and check her husband if he should attempt some insane act of violence.

A cab was passing and she entered it, telling the man to drive to Wimpole Street. Sinking back in the seat she grew half wild with excitement, and could hardly restrain the insane desire to bid the man gallop all the way.

"I shall be too late," she murmured; "I shall be too late." And she shuddered as she pictured what might have happened. What could follow when a weak, sickly man attacked one whose nerves and muscles were of iron? "He would kill him," she said with a shiver as the thought asserted itself that Braetoun was armed.

For a few minutes Olive felt that she was going mad, and she sat with her hands covering her face and pressed upon her lips firmly to keep back the hysterical cries ready to burst forth; and again she wildly asked herself why she had not followed Braetoun at once, instead of sinking into that half-stunned, helpless condition in which she had been ready to mock at his threat, treating it with contempt.

"The pistol—the pistol," she muttered, and the cold perspiration gathered on her brow and in her hands.

Once the thought intruded that she ought not to go to Murray's alone, and after what had passed; but the idea seemed as nothing then in the presence of such a horror, while the horse seemed to her as if it literally crawled.

"I shall be too late!" she moaned. "Oh, faster—faster, for Heaven's sake!" she cried to the man, who opened the trap and asked her the number.

A maid opened the door, but not until Olive had rung twice, for Rancer was out, the doctor having ceased seeing patients for the day and sent him with a message.

To the maid's surprise, the visitor stepped in at once,

"Quick, Dr. Murray!" she said; "I am Lady Braetoun."

The maid was startled, and, feeling that it was evidently some case of emergency, she led the way to a baize door on the left, opened it, tapped at the inner door, opened that, and before she could utter a word Olive rushed by her into the room.

CHAPTER XLIV.

At a Crisis.

It had been a busy morning, and, after a light lunch, Murray had sought the calm of his library, not to read, but to sit back in the gloom and ask himself whether such a life as his was worth living.

He had brought bottle and glass from his consulting-room, and, utterly exhausted, taken them up to pour out the portion he was accustomed to take as a sedative, and without which he told himself his life would have been unbearable.

"A little more, only such a little more, and the rest would be for ever. No waking to agonising thoughts, no more misery—others' and my own."

He poured out the customary dose.

"Shall I?" he said, with the weary look intensifying in his eyes; "I am so tired: how welcome it would be! Conscience has made no coward of me. No one to feel one regret; many perhaps to be glad. I dare!"

He doubled the quantity, set down the bottle carefully, replaced the stopper, and held the glass in his hand.

"And about my worldly affairs—not set in order. What import we attach to these worldly affairs—the dross that we have treasured up—to leave to others. What are they to a man who has seen the vanity and worthlessness of them all? Let them go. What are they to me? What a miserable mistaken life it has been—not one to regret me when I am gone. Well, I have been a gambler with the good things of life—staked all, and lost. There is nothing left to do but pay."

He sat forward in his easy chair, gazing down at the contents of the glass, with his arms resting upon his knees.

"But what a coward, after all! Too great to even bear my daily misery—fleeing to this relief—that of Braetoun—the miserable drunkard who pours down spirit to drown his woes. And now willing, ready, to take the great step of all—to drown mine for ever.

"Yes, coward, coward," he muttered with a laugh. "Well, I own it; but I have fought bravely. I did fight bravely till that cruel night, and then—ah, what a fall! from a tender love—the genuine sisterly love of a pure, true woman, to her contempt. Enough, this, to drive a strong man to seek his end."

He sat thinking, as he made the liquid sparkle in the glass he slowly turned round and round.

"She will know," he said softly; "she will be sure to know, and she will see the reason; but it can give her no pang now, unless she suffers because I am not at hand to save him. Well, there must come an end to it all, even for him, and I can bear it no longer. Good-bye to all my hopes and ambitions; good-bye to the love that never really lived. Olive, to you!"

There was a weary despairing look in his eyes as he raised the glass to his lips, and in another moment the contents would have been drained, but the door was opened suddenly, and the glass fell to the carpet as he started from his seat.

"Lady Braetoun!" he gasped. "Olive!"

The door closed, and she tottered toward him with her hands extended, her eyes wild and strange, as they darted a swift glance round. Then, with a piteous cry, she yielded to the overstrain, and would have fallen, but he clasped her in his arms, and bore her fainting to the couch.

"At last—at last! Olive, look up," he whispered passionately, as he went down upon one knee by her side, and drew her pale face close to his. "Sanctuary—sanctuary! Let the world say what it will, you shall be safe with me. Look up, dearest; I have loved you so long and so well. All the cruel past shall be like some feverish dream, to be forgotten in our future joys, for I love you, my own. You do not speak. Can you not hear me? Come, forget the past, and let us go at once. Far, far off, where all the many cares will die away, for you are mine—mine only now, at last—at last."

In the mad excitement of his joy at finding that she had fled to him, he could not realise that she heard no single word he uttered, and he went on whispering to her, telling her how he knew that she had borne her terrible lot till the mental strain gave way, and she had fled.

Then reason began to assert itself, and the fond idea that she could hear his words gave way, as he realised that this was no partly assumed swoon, but sheer insensibility.

"What she must have suffered first!" he muttered, as he rose from his knees to obtain water from the *carafe*, but in his mad joy forgetful of everything but the one fact that the woman he had loved so long was there, he bent down to press his lips to her brow, and then started round, for with a cry of rage Braetoun was upon him and seized him by the throat.

CHAPTER XLV.

Braetoun Gets a Check.

When Braetoun rushed out of his house, raging with fury, he leaped into the first cab and bade the man drive to Wimpole Street, but, altering his mind before he was half way there, he thrust open the little trap and shouted: "Eaton Place!"

"All right, sir," said the driver, and then, as the trap fell back: "drive you anywhere you like, captain, as long as the 'oss'll keep on his legs. My word, he's been having a pretty good soaking, and it hasn't done him good."

"I'll have it out with the old man first. It's a card to play. Curse him! I'll threaten to blow the whole affair and set the lawyers to work. He'll do anything, the old idiot, sooner than have her exposed, and he shall, too. I'll make him pay up now, and smart as I've smarted. Yes, it's a chance, and I can face him now. Won't believe me? He must—he shall."

He sat back trying hard to nerve himself for the encounter, and keep his courage screwed up to the sticking-point, but it was hard work. He kept on telling himself that with such a wife there was every excuse for all his own infidelity; but somehow in his heart of hearts he could not bring himself to believe that the charges against Olive were true; and as he drew near to Eaton Place the thought of facing Emsworth after he had goaded him by his charges into a rage, in which he would turn upon him lion-like in his wrath, was too much for him.

"I can't do it," he groaned. "I've got the spirit, but that cursed doctor has drained the strength out of me. Here, hi! cabby!"

"Yes, sir."

"Turn your horse. Wimpole Street."

"Right you are, sir," said the man; and again, as the trap closed and he turned his horse, he chuckled.

"I knowed it. He turned funky before. Going to see a doctor up in Physic Market, and he's scared. My word! he's got 'em coming on. Well, it ain't my business. Anything's better than them blessed shilling fares—unfairs, I calls 'em.—Hullo! Don't have a fit in my cab!"

For the handle of Braetoun's Malacca cane darted through the trap as it was thrown up.

"Yes, sir."

"Stop! Drive to——"

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"The devil, sir?" muttered the man.

"Drive to—to—here, stop at the first tavern."

"Which, sir?"

"Public-house, then, you confounded fool!"

"Right, sir.—I knowed it. Drop to steady him first—'fore he goes to old Bolus's. Sech is life. We're all alike, from dooks and lords, down to dustmen. Ain't I seen him before, somewhere? Reg'lar swell. Now, where was it? I know: Kempton Park. To be sure. I know. He keeps 'osses. I see him the day I drove a little thin gent down. Why, of course. Well, he's been losing, that what's the matter with him, and applying lotion."

He drew up at a tavern in Knightsbridge, and Braetoun made as if to spring out, but altered his mind.

"Here, can you leave your horse?"

"If you hold the reins, sir."

"Give me hold," cried Braetoun, handing the man half-a-crown. "Go in and fetch me a soda and brandy, small soda and a double quantity of brandy. Get yourself a glass."

"Thankye, sir," cried the cabman. "Now that's what I call a real gentleman. First decent fare I've had for a month."

"Now back to Eaton Place," said Braetoun, as he returned the glass, and the next minute the man was in his place, flicking his horse into a canter, making it look as if the refreshment imbibed by its master were being conveyed to it per whip.

"I can talk to him now," muttered Braetoun, "it's my turn to take the bat. He's had a long enough innings, and I'll let him see."

"Wait," he said, as the man drew up, and then walked up to the door in a manner which excited the driver's admiration.

"Pulled him together fine. Won't want to go to the doctor's now."

Emsworth was at home, and his son-in-law was ushered into his gloomy-looking library at once.

"Morning, Braetoun," he said, as the door closed, and the visitor glanced at the chair to which the old man pointed, but did not sit down. He was agitated, in spite of the fillip he had given himself, by the question how to begin, a matter which seemed easy enough in the cab, but hedged in with difficulties there in face of the enemy.

Emsworth knew that no pleasant mission had brought his son-in-law, and he read at a glance that it was something personal, and as there was only one thing personal—to wit, money—that could have brought him, he quietly prepared himself for the encounter.

"Excuse me one moment," he said, taking a stout, crutch-handled cane from where it stood in a tall waste-paper basket, and limping to the bell, which he rang, and then limping back directed and fastened down the flap of an envelope.

"Take that yourself to the House of Commons Committee rooms," he said to the servant who entered. "You can have a cab."

The man took the letter, and the door was closed.

"Gout's a bit tiresome this morning. How's your wife?"

The way to begin offered and Braetoun seized it.

"Curse my wife!" he cried, facing the old man savagely.

"What!" cried Emsworth, scowling. "Humph! you ought to curse her for saving your life over and over again when you'd have been far better dead. What is it? Won't she come begging for you, and you're obliged to come yourself?"

"Yes, that's it," said Braetoun fiercely. "I'm obliged to come myself."

"Might have saved yourself the trouble, my lad. NO. Is that plain enough?"

"It's plain enough," said Braetoun half seating himself on the edge of the table; "but it won't do this time. Things have gone badly with me lately; I am heavily hit, and people are going to put an execution in the house."

"I'm not surprised," said Emsworth coldly. "May bring you to your senses. Sickness won't, and you've another fit coming on."

"What do you mean?" cried Braetoun, startled by the old man's manner.

"What I say. You look deadly, and you've been making it worse by drinking. I can smell it here."

"And enough to make a man drink—enough to give any man a fit."

"What, losing the money? Shouldn't have risked it."

"Then by your manner you mean that you won't help me now that I'm in this hole."

"That's it, my lad; not even if they clear the house, and take the roof off. I've plenty of room for my child here."

"Then have the room got ready, for unless you come down with what I want, you'll very soon have her."

"Indeed!" said Emsworth coolly, as he watched his son-in-law narrowly. "Well, I'm not surprised, and I'm not sorry. You see, Braetoun, I thought you were a gentleman, and I made a mistake."

"What? No: it was I thought your daughter a lady, and I made a mistake."

"No mistake, sir, I never pretended she was anything but Isaac Emsworth's daughter, well educated, and with a handsome dowry."

"Out of which," said Braetoun, trying hard to restrain himself from playing what he looked upon as his trump card at once, "out of which, as it is by right mine, you will immediately arrange that I have a sufficiency for my present needs."

"Because you have gambled away every shilling you have, and more to, and want to send my poor girl's bit of money after it."

"It's my wife's money, and I want some of it now."

"Because again you've proved that you are unfit to take charge of it—because you have proved that you are a man without a spark of honour in you, and want to go on breaking my poor girl's heart while you amuse yourself with your mistresses and drink yourself into a state of d.t's."

"And what if I do?" cried Braetoun fiercely. "Am I to tie myself down to a woman like that?"

A curious change come over the old man's countenance, but Braetoun did not see it.

"You'd better go now, Braetoun, and keep away," growled Emsworth. "I promised Olive I would not quarrel with you, so be off. My leg makes me hot-tempered."

"D——n your hot temper, sir; what is it to me? I've come here as I have come to let you know the truth. Will you pay my debts out of that woman's money?"

"No, sir, I will not pay your debts 'out of that woman's money.' If you're sold up, let her come home, and if she does she doesn't come back to you."

"Then curse you; you shall have it, and you shall pay the money too. You talk to me of making a mistake, and your thinking me a man of honour. Why, confound you! you miserable old money-hunting schemer, do you suppose that a gentleman in my position is going to tie himself down to all the petty little notions of you narrow-minded people? No, it was not you who made a mistake; it was I. I thought that I was going to marry an honest woman, instead of a miserable——"

"Stop! Mind what you are saying, sir."

"I will mind what I'm saying, but you shall have it straight from the shoulder this time. I say you've got to give me full control of that money—my wife's money."

"And I've told you that you shan't have a penny," said the old man, who was very pale now.

"Then I'll drive it out of you another way, and from him too."

Emsworth started.

"Ah, that hits you, does it?" cried Braetoun, who was

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now beside himself with rage. "I tell you this, that unless matters are made up, the whole thing shall come out. I'll place it in a sharp lawyer's hands, and I don't care now: people will pity, not blame me. I'll have the whole thing in the court: 'Divorce in High Life,' on the newspaper bills, and drag out all the cursed rotten business into the broad daylight for the public to revel on. You old scoundrel: you've known it from the first. There, you shrink and cower before me, you old villain."

He was quite right: Emsworth was shrinking and cowering. He placed his hand upon the table and leant forward, looking ghastly, as he glared at the frantic man before him.

"Mistake? Yes, and you conniving at it all through. Curse her for a miserable baggage. You were all in it for the sake of the title. I believe she was Murray's mistress from the first."

There was a meaning in Emsworth's cowering, for his right hand had been stealing slowly down behind the library table towards the waste-paper basket, till he grasped his stout cane, and then with a roar like that of a roused lion, he sprang at Braetoun. With one vigorous cut across the shoulder he made him stagger back, and before he could recover himself, he had him on his knees, waling him across back and shoulders, everywhere that he could bring the cane down, till, breathless with rage and excitement, he threw all his power into a last cut, and hurled him back, and all in spite of the feeble struggle with which his onslaught was met.

"You dog! You lying, cowardly dog!" he cried, now speaking for the first time, as he stood with one foot resting on the utterly prostrated man's breast. "You mean, despicable hound! You have pretty well broken my poor girl's heart, you whose every touch has defiled her, and now to bully and frighten me into letting you have money, you dare to bring that vile, infamous charge against her, and the noblest, truest gentleman that ever breathed. You dare to threaten to make it known—to publish the lie, the blasphemous lie, against my sweet angel of a girl—why, d——n you, if I haven't killed you by what I've done now, you miserable, pitiful wretch, I'll finish my work and rid the British aristocracy of a hanger-on to its disgrace."

"It's true—it's true!" shrieked Braetoun, as he lay writhing and literally foaming at the mouth. "Kill me and hang for it; but I will publish it now. Your innocent angel! Curse you, you old idiot! There isn't a worse——"

Emsworth literally dropped upon him and caught him by the throat, but he had, big strong man as he was, already overtaxed his strength, and feeble as were Braetoun's efforts to free himself, they were sufficient, and he struggled to his feet panting and holding his hands to his left breast, where there was a sensation as if his ribs had been crushed in.

Then an ugly look came over his face as he realised the cause, and he thrust one hand into his pocket and kept it there with his fingers closing over the butt and chambers of the short, thick revolver he had placed there that morning.

For a few moments, as he stood panting and quivering with rage and pain, he felt ready to draw the weapon and revenge himself upon the man who had beaten him till he could hardly stand; but as he saw Emsworth now supporting himself against the low table, ghastly white and trembling too, a malignant joy made his heart throb, for he felt that he had the means at hand to stab him with a weapon that would pain the old man far more, and better gratify his thirst for revenge.

"You old ruffian!" he gasped out as he saw he had nothing more to fear; and he began arranging his collar and tie and brushing imaginary specks from his coat. "You shall suffer for this. It's true! It has been going on all through my worst illnesses. Lie? Ask Nurse Jennett. Go to your dear friend, Allan Murray—my dear old trusty friend—and charge him with it. What is my little bit of gallantry to that? Yes, go to him, but not yet. Let me settle my business with him first, and after all London has rung with the wretched case—the Fashionable Physician and the Millionaire's Child—make him marry her to hide her shame."

"Stop!" cried Emsworth hoarsely, as he raised his hands, but clutched at the table to save himself from falling. "Braetoun, stop!"

For a moment the young man hesitated, in the half belief that he could make his infamous bargain for silence now; but the pain of the blows he had received sent such a thrill of passion through him that he rushed from the room.

"Better than a bullet," he muttered, and, passing out, he hurried into his cab, unconscious of the fact that the old man had half blindly felt his way to the bell, dragged at it, and then, as he tried to reach a chair, fallen heavily in a fit.

(To be continued.)

Jumbled Story Competition.—20.

On page 636 appears a story, each line of which is numbered. The lines are all in their wrong position, and the prizes mentioned below are offered to those who write on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in the order most nearly correct. The title is jumbled up, and should be correctly given *and pasted on the paper containing the effort.*

The conditions are jumbled in the following paragraph as an example. The correct order of the lines is given in line 10.

1 SHORT STORIES on or before *Monday,*
2 awarded to the readers whose solutions first
3 *JUMBLED STORY.*
4 Four Prizes—one of £5 and three of £1 each—are
5 *November 16th,* and envelopes must be marked
6 correct. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be
7 reach this office.
8 All attempts to be delivered at the offices of
9 offered to the readers whose keys are most nearly
10 4—9—6—2—7—8—1—5—3—12—11—13—10.
11 a sheet of paper the figures in the order they
12 Competitors in doing the story should write on
13 believe to be correct, thus:

£2 is offered to the first of the readers living in Ireland who succeeds in forwarding the correct, or most nearly correct, solution.

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CORPULENCY.

INCREASING POPULARITY OF AN EFFECTUAL CURE.

MANY of our readers are, doubtless, familiar with the nature of the extraordinary revolution in the cure of obesity which, within recent years, has been wrought by the original researches of that now eminent expert, Mr. F. Cecil Russell, of Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C. It is evident that the certainty, the rapidity, and the agreeable surroundings of his curative process have been recognised, in a very large degree, among ladies and gentlemen belonging to the highest social circles. Keen observers who have an opportunity of judging inform us, through the pages of society papers and otherwise, that owing to the general employment of Mr. Russell's treatment extreme obesity is becoming as much a thing of the past, at fashionable gatherings, as intoxication; and, no doubt, it will soon be regarded as nearly as disgraceful. The issue of an eighteenth edition of the author's singularly convincing little text-book, "Corpulency, and the Cure," however, serves to remind us that the popularity of the system has now reached spheres far remote from those of West-end fashion. The book of 256 pages may be had (post free) by sending two penny stamps to Mr. Russell's offices, as above; and it is worth the careful attention of those who wish to free themselves of a burden of fat—not merely because it is unseemly and adds enormously to the apparent age of the sufferer—but because extreme obesity terribly interferes with the energy necessary in these days of competition to make one's way in the world, or even to earn a very modest competency. A large proportion of the letters of Mr. Russell's grateful correspondents refer to their delight at being enabled—within a very brief period, and without any irksome conditions implying semi-starvation—to attack their accustomed tasks with pleasure instead of wearied disgust, through being reduced to their normal weight. The popularity of the system is also largely due, doubtless, to the English hatred of mystery, which is utterly swept aside by Mr. Russell. He fully explains his modus operandi, and supplies the receipt for his preparation.—*Bicester Herald, March 13th*, 1896.

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MR. STEVENSON EXCEPTED.

RULES are illustrated by exceptions. One of the exceptions was the late Robert Louis Stevenson. (Alas! that we should have to speak of him as "the late.")

Afflicted with a disease which was sure to kill him, and right well he knew it, he was seldom in the dumps. His *body* was ill, but *he* was not. What a rare spirit he had! Most of us are put together differently. When an ailment, like a burglar, breaks into our house of dust, we talk, as this woman talks: "I felt languid, weak, and dejected." Dejected *because* languid and weak. Unlike Mr. Stevenson's, our spirits go down with our physical condition.

Describing her own case, Mrs. Lloyd further tells us that her trouble began in October, 1887, with what she styles a "slight stroke." Probably one of those hints of paralysis that Nature gives sometimes, meaning nothing more serious in that line at present. Yet wise people, thus warned, will try to find out the reason, and be guided by it.

"After this," continues the lady, "I felt languid, weak, and dejected. I had a poor appetite, and after eating suffered from a sense of pain and weight at the chest. I was constantly spitting up a sour fluid, and wind from the stomach rushed into my throat as though it must choke me. I soon grew so weak as to be scarcely able to walk about, and was obliged to lie on the couch a considerable part of the day.

"I consulted doctors, as any one would in my place, and took their medicines, but they had only a small measure of success in relieving me. I might have felt better for a day or two, but always relapsed into my habitual state. I have to thank my malady for nine years of bodily and mental misery, for I never saw a well day during the whole time.

"In September, 1893, I read in a little book about the cures Mother Seigel's Syrup had effected in cases like mine. I got a bottle from Mr. W. Colley, the chemist, in Wrentham Street, and after taking it found myself better. Another bottle or two restored my appetite and digestion, and with it my strength. Lightness and brightness took the place of depression and melancholy. Since then I have had good health, thanks to Mother Seigel's Syrup. You may publish this statement if you wish. (Signed) (Mrs.) Sarah Lloyd, No. 1 House, 13 Court, Lower Essex Street, Birmingham, September 18th, 1895."

"In May, 1892," writes another, "I had a severe attack of inflammation of the bowels, and was under medical treatment. On recovering from the acute stage of this disorder, I found myself completely exhausted. My appetite was feeble and fickle, and what little I ate gave me pain at the chest and sides. I seemed to be full of wind, and frequently belched up a sour fluid. I also suffered from continual pain in the head just over the eyes. I was so low and despondent that I took no real pleasure in anything.

"After suffering for six months in this way, I read of Mother Seigel's Syrup, and procured a bottle from the Provident Co-operative Stores, Whitehall branch. Taking it for a few days I felt wonderfully better. My appetite came back and food agreed with me. I continued with the Syrup, and was soon as strong as ever. But you may depend upon it that I have since then always kept a bottle of Mother Seigel's Syrup in the house, and if I need medicine a few doses always set me right. I have told relatives and friends about this remedy, and am willing you should publish what I have said. (Signed) (Mrs.) Sarah Ann Wright, 35, Duxbury Street, Darwen, Lancs, February 27th, 1895."

As I have remarked, very few of us can be cheerful while the body is for any reason weak and in pain. And of all diseases to depress the spirits and to saturate the very soul of man with gloom I will back indigestion or dyspepsia against the field. It sends more people to the lunatic asylums than all the other complaints combined. A man like Mr. Stevenson may be chick and chipper with consumption, but indigestion would have turned even *him* into a misanthrope. Stop it at the outset with the remedy that cured our correspondents.

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